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Nurturing Adolescent Lifelong Discipleship: Implementing a Hermeneutic of "Adoption" at St. Paul United Methodist Church

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IMPLEMENTING A HERMENEUTIC OF "ADOPTING"
AT ST. PAUL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Written by

DAVID S. SHOWALTER

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NURTURING ADOLESCENT LIFELONG DISCIPLESHIP: IMPLEMENTING A HERMENEUTIC OF "ADOPTION" AT ST. PAUL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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BY

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ABSTRACT

Nurturing Adolescent Lifelong Discipleship: Implementing a Hermeneutic of "Adoption" at St. Paul United Methodist Church

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2014

The purpose of this study is to provide a strategy for youth ministry at St. Paul United Methodist Church, establishing "adoption" as a baseline hermeneutic, making it more likely that adolescents grow into lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. Although no research exists which proves concretely that a particular youth ministry approach can guarantee an adolescent will embrace discipleship of Jesus Christ for a lifetime (nor is such research likely possible), nevertheless, a church can position itself to make such a trajectory more likely. This project asserts that a hermeneutic of adoption is the polar opposite of, and the Church's correct response to, systemic abandonment of contemporary American adolescents. The Church can assist adolescents in their journey through individuation—identity, autonomy, and belonging or reconnection—in a more holistic fashion than other institutions through redemptive embrace of both their psychosocial and spiritual needs.

This project examines the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents. The study reflects on the key theological issues of discipling adolescents for a journey of lifelong discipleship with an emphasis on God's grace and power to transform the whole person from within. A theology of "adoption" is presented as the Church's proper response to the "current" of systemic abandonment of youth prevalent in contemporary culture. Biblical, historical, and ecclesiological examples and applications supporting a hermeneutic of adoption are presented. Finally, a strategy for needed change in order to implement a hermeneutical of adoption for youth ministry at St. Paul United Methodist Church is posed. The intended outcome is that St. Paul United Methodist Church will be a more interconnected body of Christ, living a hermeneutic of adoption with respect to the Church's relationship between adolescents and their families, making it more likely that St. Paul's "sons and daughters" will become lifelong disciples of Jesus the Christ.

Theological Mentor: Chap Clark, PhD

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In honor and remembrance of my parents, Sam and Lola Showalter, and to my wife Debby, all of whom have encouraged me to trust Jesus, love others, and pursue God's plan for my life with unwavering passion

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INTRODUCTION

At the end of the 1994 Castle Rock movie, *The Shawshank Redemption*, "Red," a recently paroled longtime inmate, is traveling on a bus to settle in Mexico with his escapee friend Andy. As Red's bus travels toward the Mexican border across which he will find his lifelong freedom, Red offers this soliloquy about that for which he hopes: "I hope I can make it across the border. I hope to see my friend and shake his hand. I hope the Pacific [Ocean] is as blue as it has been in my dreams. I hope."[1]

If Red indeed makes it to the sea, it is possible that he will find treacherous currents and countercurrents waiting to carrying him far away from his dreams. Like Red, adolescents in Western culture today are dreaming of a life of tranquility, "when I get older." However, they often find that the "sea of the adolescent journey" is dangerous beyond their imaginings. Youth attempting to navigate the sea of the adolescent journey are asking the crucial development questions: "Who am I," "Do I matter," and "Where do I belong?" Many adolescents feel "tossed about" to the point of being "pulled under" by their task of individuation. This is especially true if adolescents feel they must navigate this journey alone.

One of the most significant "currents" running in the sea of the adolescent journey to which youth workers must respond is the current of systemic abandonment of the young. Adolescent culture and development researcher Chap Clark believes that contemporary culture has become largely inattentive toward the developmental needs of the young. These "currents" create an environment in which adolescents must "work

[1] *The Shawshank Redemption*, directed by Frank Darabont, Castle Rock Entertainment, 1994, closing scene.

hard at finding out how to make it on their own," which is, in Clark's estimation, a nearly impossible task for them.[2] Professor of Child Study David Elkind adds that such abandonment leads contemporary youth to feel not only unsupported, but "victimized."[3]

There are other "currents" that contribute to such abandonment and are counter to healthy psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents which likely impede lifelong discipleship. Examples include the extension of the adolescent journey which has led to the creation of "midadolescence," contemporary cultural influences on the young, "shallowness" in relationships, and even the religious practices of faith communities. Each of these "currents" presents major obstacles to the Church hoping to nurture youth toward lifelong discipleship.[4]

A theology for youth ministry based on a hermeneutic of adoption[5] is the polar opposite of, and the Church's correct response to, the "countercurrent" of systemic abandonment of contemporary American adolescents. The Church can assist adolescents

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[2] Chap Clark, *Hurt 2.0: Inside the World of Today's Teenagers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

[3] David Elkind, *Ties That Stress* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[4] For an in-depth analysis of systemic abandonment issues, see Clark, *Hurt 2.0*. For a detailed discussion on the creation of "midadolescence" due to extending adolescent period, see Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected: Parenting Teens in a MySpace World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). For contemporary youth culture issues, see Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2007). For relationship and religious practices issues, see Chap Clark and Kara E. Powell, *Deep Ministry in a Shallow World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 2006) especially Section 2, and Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[5] A "hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry" would be evidenced by a church that embraces adolescents who are traversing the psychosocial and spiritual adolescent journey in a fashion obvious to those adolescents. Churches practicing a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry are seen by youth as openly and compassionately sharing in the adolescent journey of faith, "walking with them" during the highly formative years of adolescence. Such an interpretation of youth ministry would see adults exhibiting incarnational, intergenerational discipleship among youth, inviting and enabling adolescents to be part of the larger Church in meaningful ways in deed and word that answer in convincing fashion the developmental questions asked by adolescents. Chap Clark, "Strategic Adoption: Developing a Holistic Ecclesiology" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, October 24-28, 2011).

in their journey to individuation as they struggle through identity, autonomy, and belonging in a more holistic fashion than do other institutions. Churches can demonstrate a redemptive embrace of adolescents' psychosocial needs and their spiritual needs as well. Through ministries to, for, with, and through youth that are based on a hermeneutic of adoption and intergenerational interconnection, the Church can also support families whose adolescents are traversing this part of their life journey. Youth ministry based on a hermeneutic of adoption of the young will make it more likely that adolescents grow into lifelong discipleship.

A contemporary American adolescent's psychosocial development process is a daunting journey to navigate. Adolescents attempt to "individuate" during this period, striving to determine their identity, establish autonomy, and search for belonging within (or reconnection to) a community. The period and process of adolescent psychosocial development presents crucial age-related challenges for youth, and therefore also presents challenges to youth workers who strive to disciple adolescents for the long term. When youth feel abandoned by adults who should care for and about them during this crucial time of development, youth will not trust adults, bringing sometimes insurmountable challenges to those who would be their disciplers.

While adolescents are transitioning through the process of psychosocial development, they may also be developing spiritually. An exploration of the larger Church's theology and doctrine will assist the Church in examining the hope of effectiveness in nurturing youth toward lifelong discipleship. Specific Church history, mission, vision, goals, environment, willingness to invest in the lives of their young, and

their response to the systemic abandonment of youth also directly affect the Church's ability to disciple adolescents for the long term.

God has provided the Church with an appropriate hermeneutic on which to base an approach to youth ministry that will help to overcome the countercurrent that is contemporary culture's abandonment of adolescents. This is a hermeneutic of adoption, which is needed to counter the abandonment adolescents feel and which provides a biblical foundation for adolescent psychosocial and spiritual development. Through God's self-initiated covenant with Abram in Genesis 15, God promises to create the nation Israel, promising also to provide for and protect them as God's family. According to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:13, all of humankind are baptized into Christ's body the Church, as if being "adopted" into God's family by the Holy Spirit. In John 15:16, Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you." An exegesis of Galatians 5 provides a theology of one's identity based on one's relationship with the Creator God that counters the current of worth based on "performance" under which contemporary adolescents struggle. In his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard proposes that the gospel is often interpreted and applied by Christians in a manner he calls "sin management."[6] A hermeneutic of adoption—founded on a theology of discipleship that is based on eagerly waiting for the hope of God's righteousness through God's Holy Spirit by faith, internal transformation of the person by God's grace, and "faith expressing itself in love"—counters the current of "performance-based" and "sin management" discipleship and increases the chance for lifelong discipleship of adolescents.

[6] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 41-50.

Early interdenominational and United Methodist youth ministry efforts were based on acceptance of youth as God created them. Without naming them as such, portions of these efforts reflected an adoptive approach which can serve the contemporary Church well in discipling youth. Portions of these youth ministry approaches are valuable to the adaptive change needed to implement a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. Some past and current discipleship strategies must be left behind, while others may be valuable if enhanced when implementing a hermeneutic of adoption that will help nurture students toward lifelong discipleship.

There exist ecclesiological aspects from missional Church and United Methodist doctrine and praxis that enhance an adoptive approach to youth ministry for the formation of lifelong disciples. A "missional" Church accepts and reflects aspects of "adoption" of its youth in attempting to disciple their young for lifelong faithfulness within the community. Both "missional churches" and United Methodist doctrine embrace seeking out, inviting, accepting, and discipling the "last, least and lost."[7] Contemporary adolescents raised in a culture of abandonment fit that demographic. There also exist missional Church applications to family ministry that make nurturing youth toward lifelong discipleship more likely. Exploring ecclesiological applications from the larger Church perspective and then relating those applications to the adoptive approach for youth ministry by St. Paul United Methodist Church (hereafter, St. Paul) will enhance this church's ability to disciple its youth for life.

[7] The "last, least, and lost" is a descriptive phrase of those to whom Jesus ministered very deliberately and acknowledged verbally. These were people who could also be considered "forsaken" in some manner by the culture in which they lived. See Matthew 19:21-30, Matthew 25: 31-45, Luke 15: 1-32. See also Psalm 22, quoted by Jesus on the cross, which provides insight into the spirit of those "forsaken" of whom Jesus spoke and those forsaken by today's society.

Enacting a hermeneutic of adoption as the youth ministry model for nurturing lifelong discipleship will require a church to make adaptive changes. Stakeholders in a change process are those who will have to change or who will have a legitimate claim on the changes to be made. All believers are stakeholders if the Church is to fulfill the mission of making lifelong disciples of Jesus the Christ, though some are more critical than others. The change process will focus on change needed by the primary stakeholders, who are those with the most at stake in the change process. Change techniques likely to be required in order to make adaptive changes to establish "adoption" as a baseline hermeneutic will need to be defined. St. Paul will need to reframe its ministry strategy to enact a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. The process for implementing the adaptive change necessary for enacting the new model will include an analysis of the ministry stakeholders and the recommended adaptive changes to be made by each. Change techniques that will be used to implement the needed transformations must also be identified and described.

Constant evaluation of how well a church is implementing a hermeneutic of adoption will be required. Churches nurturing youth toward lifelong discipleship should base adolescent discipleship on adolescents actively awaiting the righteousness for which they hope while trusting Jesus for the abundant life and complete joy Jesus promises to his followers in John 15. Reports on both successes of and continuing challenges to the discipleship plan established as well as identifying continuing improvement actions to address continuing challenges are necessary to keep ministry efforts from stalling.

There is no guarantee that youth worker actions to nurture youth toward lifelong discipleship will ensure that each and every one becomes and remains a faithful lifelong

disciple of Jesus the Christ. But because God is known for his faithfulness, the Church has hope founded on Galatians 5:5 that it can better prepare contemporary adolescents to "keep their heads above water" in the sea of adolescent development and swim against the "countercurrent" of cultural abandonment in which they find themselves.

Much like Red in the *Shawshank Redemption*, youth workers hope for many good things. The Church does not hope in a state of inactivity. The Church must disciple the young with hope in the context of a faith grounded in Jesus the Christ who overcame sin and death. Hebrews defines faith in terms of such hope: "Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." James 2:17 defines such faith as active faith, stating, "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead." In 1 Corinthians 3:6, the Apostle Paul takes for granted that the Church acts even as it depends on God for ensuring kingdom-trajectory results. One may plant, another may water, but it is God who gives the increase. As disciplers of the young, the Church bears the responsibility to not just "be interested in" or "supportive of" the young, but to invest in their spiritual growth process with their own lives. As God adopted all humankind into his Kingdom, so the Church is to "adopt" the young into the community of faith and its life in God.

Youth workers hope that the ministries to which God has called them reflect the characteristics of "adoption" toward adolescents. Youth disciplers hope that the adolescents whom God places in their care and those whom are sought out will feel "adopted" by the Church and by God such that they want to passionately pursue Jesus the Christ as their Lord and Savior because they trust Jesus for that which is best. Youth

workers hope to encourage and enhance the ability of the families of youth to disciple their children.

Youth workers hope church members will see each adolescent and his or her family as "the church's own." Church members who are "adoptive" create a church that is an interconnected body across age spectrum. Such adults come along side of adolescents in the discipleship process. Youth workers hope in Christ that their efforts help their churches bear the fruit of youth who become lifelong disciples. Although no one can guarantee that outcome, it is hoped that by founding an approach to youth ministry in a "hermeneutic of adoption" of the young, churches can make it more likely that their "sons and daughters" continue to develop, mature, and grow as disciples of Jesus the Christ, placing their trust in Jesus over their lifetimes. It is to this purpose and hopeful result that this strategy is offered.

PART ONE

MINISTRY CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

ADOLESCENTS IN THE UNITED STATES TODAY

Discipling adolescents is a significant ministry challenge. In order to nurture youth toward lifelong discipleship, those who work with adolescents must be able to understand features with respect to when adolescence begins and ends, the developmental processes that occur within the individual during this time period, and the influences upon the adolescent journey. Like a ship trying to navigate the ocean, the adolescent journey encounters currents, some of which can help provide smooth sailing, while some of which oppose a young person's individuation. Adolescence is a lengthy and hugely formative time when psychosocial[1] and spiritual[2] development crucial to one's individuation takes place.[3]

[1] The term "psychosocial" refers to how both psychological and social inputs affect adolescent development. Chap Clark describes psychosocial development with regard to adolescents as the relationship between how adolescents view themselves (psychological) and how they perceive others view them (social). Chap Clark, "Psychosocial Development of Adolescents" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November 1-5, 2010). Drs. Kara Powell and Chap Clark provide a concise and practical explanation of how identity development is both psychological and social. "The concept of identity includes both a personal dimension, as in 'who I see myself to be as distinct from others,' and a communal dimension, as in 'who I am as connected to others.'" Clark and Powell go on to emphasize that one cultivates a "rich and sustainable faith" by sharing the journey of faith within a faith community where the individual discovers her or his true identity. See Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 59.

[2] In analyzing the main survey and interview findings of the National Study of Youth and Religion conducted by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill from 2001 through 2005, sociologists

It is important for youth workers to determine over what time period the adolescent journey occurs. Developmental psychologist Jeffrey Arnett defines adolescence as the time in one's life between the onset of puberty and when adult status begins. Arnett defines a young person as an adult when one assumes the roles and responsibilities her or his culture deems "adult."[4] John Santrock, also a developmental psychologist, asserts that adolescence is a time period between childhood and adulthood influenced by biological, sociological, emotional, and historical affects and is the time in which an essential task of the adolescent is preparing to be an adult.[5] Arnett asserts the onset of adolescence as early as age ten and its endpoint as sometime in one's late twenties.[6] Santrock alleges that adolescence begins for most American youth between ages ten and thirteen and ends between ages eighteen and twenty-two, with the exact beginning and ending ages varying depending on historical and cultural influences.[7]

Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist Denton concluded that many teenagers are very involved in religion and that those teenagers say their religious beliefs and practices are significant parts of their lives. See Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). A nationwide survey conducted by Fixed Point to find out why and when young atheists embraced unbelief of the God of the Bible determined, "For most, the high school years were the time when [young atheists] embraced unbelief." See Fixed Point, "Listening to Young Atheists," http://fixedpointfix.com/listening-to-young-atheists/ (accessed June 8, 2013).

[3] While just three decades ago the study of adolescent development was largely absent in the field of adolescent science, today academia recognizes adolescent development as a "distinct and major field within developmental science, one that plays a major role in informing . . . other areas of focus." See Richard Lerner and Laurence Steinberg, eds., *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Volume 1, 3rd ed. (Hoboken: Wiley & Sons, 2009), xiii-xv.

[4] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood: A Cultural Approach* (Boston: Prentiss Hall, 2010), 2.

[5] John Santrock, *Adolescence*; 12th ed. (Boston: McGraw Hill, 2008), 16-17.

[6] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 25.

[7] Santrock, *Adolescence, 17*. The age of menarche, the evidence of pubertal process in females, has been dropping in the United States. By 1970, various research sources such as the American Medical

Clark extrapolates Santrock's definition of adolescence in a more psychosocially descriptive manner and demarcates it as such: "Adolescence is the journey from biological adulthood to societal adulthood."[8]

While the entrance age into adolescence is based on biology and is therefore somewhat ambiguous, so too is its exit point into adulthood. G. Stanley Hall, who pioneered the study of adolescence at the beginning of the twentieth century, demarcated what he defined as adolescence as the years between ages ten and twenty-three.[9] It is noteworthy that developmental researchers today hesitate to use biological age as a marker in determining the end of the adolescent journey. Nearly four decades ago, child and adolescent psychoanalyst Peter Blos referred to the variables affecting the length of the adolescent journey with the statement, "Puberty is an act of nature and adolescence is an act of man."[10] Blos's comment adds to the voices of those who assert that the endpoint of adolescence involves more than just biology.

Clark agrees that the end of adolescence is determined much more by psychosocial development factors and cultural norms than by biological age. He writes,

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Association and the Center for Disease Control showed the median age of menarche for females in the United States had dropped to around age 12.5 (from nearly age 15 in 1890). Examples of such research findings include those of *Journal of the American Medical Association*, "Age of Menarche in Girls in a West-South-Central Community" (October 1970), http://archpedi.jamanetwork.com (accessed June 4, 2013) and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Age at Menarche, United States," 1973, http://stacks.cdc.gov/view/cdc/12656/ (accessed June 4, 2013). According to Arnett, since the onset of puberty typically occurs two years earlier than visible signs manifest, adolescence can be estimated to begin as early as age 10 for some U. S. teenagers. See Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 7-8.

[8] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 10.

[9] G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).

[10] Peter Blos, *The Adolescent Passage; Developmental Issues* (New York: International Universities Press, 1979), 404.

"When culture affirms that someone has individuated in terms of identity, is willing to take responsibility for his or her own life and choices, and has entered interdependently into the community and adult relationships, that person is said to be an adult."[11] Clark maintains that today, attaining such a state of maturity takes many into their middle to late twenties. Arnett provides supporting research for Clark's assertion and has characterized this carryover of adolescent development into one's twenties as "extended adolescence" or "emerging adulthood."[12] Clark and his colleague, Kara E. Powell, provide assistance to discussions of adolescent development by summarily stating the typical age range which researchers consider the end of adolescence is between eighteen and twenty years old, and by identifying the period of "emerging adulthood" (crediting Arnett with the term) as between the end of adolescence and one's late twenties.[13]

Youth disciplers need to be aware of some of the unique challenges presented by acknowledgment that adolescence has extended and created a stage of the adolescent journey identified as "midadolescence." For a long time, the adolescent journey had been divided into "early adolescence" (ages ten to fourteen)[14] and "late adolescence" (high

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[11] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 11.

[12] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, x. Arnett prefers the term "emerging adult" as he believes labeling one as "adolescent" at this late stage could inhibit their development. While Clark agrees for the most part, he also reminds adults (parents) to be aware of the recurrence of adolescent tendencies and actions in this stage. See Chap Clark, "Parenting through the Seasons," in Chap Clark and Dee Clark, *Disconnected*, 154-155.

[13] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 216. Because academia is observing characteristics once thought of as "adolescent" in early- to mid- and sometimes late-twenties persons, researchers sometimes include "adolescents" and "emerging adults" into subject groups. This project will adhere to the particular author's classification in quoting and citing sources.

[14] The ages ten to fourteen are used by *The Journal of Early Adolescence* to demarcate this particular developmental period. *Journal of Early Adolescence* online, "Home page," http://jea.sagepub.com/ (accessed June 10, 2013).

school, college, and young adulthood).[15] "Midadolescence," however, has only been recognized and begun to be researched during the past two decades. As is true for identifying the beginning and end of adolescence, ages used to demarcate midadolescence vary. The U. S. Department of Health and Human Services demarcates midadolescence within the ages of approximately fourteen and eighteen, and by some of the unique and significant challenges encountered by young persons during this developmental stage.[16] Clark demarcates midadolescence with respect to age as the span from roughly fourteen to twenty.[17] Specifying this age range is a significant statement, as it is with this age group that the typical church youth worker provides spiritual direction.

Another key challenge for youth workers hoping to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship of Jesus Christ is to understand the developmental processes that occur within the individual during this time period. A crucial developmental process that occurs during the adolescent journey is that which social scientists refer to as "individuation." Individuation essentially means "becoming one's own person."[18] Clark

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[15] Arnett is especially helpful in providing research for extended adolescent behavior that defines this developmental period. Arnett credits Erikson's recognition of a perceived "psychosocial moratorium," which Erikson believed leads to adolescent behavior into one's twenties. See Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 17-31 and Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1968), 156.

[16] U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, "What Is Adolescence," U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, http://www.hhs.gov/opa/familylife/tech_assistance/etraining/adolescent_brain/Overview/what_is_adolescence/ (accessed June 11, 2013).

[17] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, xiv.

[18] "Individuation" is a Jungian concept referred to in James E. Loder, *The Logic of the Spirit: Human Development in Theological Perspective* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 286. Loder paraphrased Jung's exact words to make this concept more succinct. Jung defined "individuation" specifically as "the process by which a person becomes a psychological in-dividual, that is, a separate, indivisible unity or whole." See Wolfgang Schirmacher and Sven Nebelung, *German Essays on Psychology: Alfred Adler, Anna Freud, C. G. Jung and Others* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2001), 140.

and Clark offer that "individuation describes the path taken by the adolescent toward becoming a unique individual."[19]

Blos refers to adolescents' attempt to individuate as the "second individuation process." The first separation-individuation phase, referred to by Mahler as "the psychological birth of the individual," occurs during early childhood as the infant begins to realize that he or she is a person separate from his or her primary love interest, typically the mother. Mahler provides a helpful distinction between the childhood individuation process and Blos's "second individuation" during adolescence, thusly, "The discovery being made is not about 'who' the child is, as is true for the second individuation which occurs in adolescence, but has more to do with "that I am."[20] Individuation during the adolescent journey then encompasses much more than just discovering "that I am." The individuation process can be thought of as adolescents journeying to a status in which they are confident enough in whom they have determined themselves to be that they can integrate with and contribute to an adult society.

Individuating adolescents attempt to master three vital tasks of adolescence: discovering their identity, achieving autonomy, and finding belonging (or reconnection). In forming their identity, young people ask the question, "Who am I?" Autonomy is the midadolescent's search for self-direction and independence. At issue with respect to autonomy is the adolescent developing a sense of self (identity) in a way that interacts with the world. The questions to be answered in this stage of the journey are, "Do I

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[19] Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 52.

[20] Margaret S. Mahler, Fred Pine, Anni Bergman, *The Psychological Birth of the Human Infant: Symbiosis and Individuation* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 8-10.

matter?" and "How do my decisions affect others?" At the end of the adolescent journey is belonging (reconnection), during which the young person tries to discover where the "who I am" and "do I matter" fit into some community. The questions here are: "Where do I belong?" and at the entrance to healthy adulthood, "What can I contribute?"

Adolescent individuation is a complex matter. This is because the three main tasks of the adolescent journey—identity exploration, accomplishing autonomy, and finding belonging—are inextricable parts of the process.[21] The separation and exploration process of individuation is often daunting, even dangerous for the adolescent. Those who would strive to minister to youth and families by attempting to assist those families as they disciple their youth for the long term must be aware of the potential pitfalls of this process.

Blos noted nearly four decades ago that frustration and fear sometimes led to a stalling of development for the adolescents who began to feel they could not swim against the seeming countercurrent to their progress. Blos observed that some adolescents became overwhelmed by the development process and gave up. He saw that during individuation the adolescent typically takes increasing responsibility for their actions and identity. It sometimes became a prevailing attitude of the more "sophisticated" adolescent to place the blame for any failures of character elsewhere. Adolescents at the time of Blos's research were seen to blame their parents; society ("the culture"); or larger "powers" such as fate, God, karma, or other persons or factors beyond their control. Blos noted, "It appears senseless to the adolescent who has taken such a position to rise against these forces; rather, he declares that an attitude of resigned

[21] Santrock, *Adolescence*, 148.

purposelessness is the true hallmark of maturity."[22] The individuation process is arguably more daunting for contemporary adolescents. Countercurrents flowing in the ocean of adolescent development, potentially delaying or preventing healthy individuation, are the typical challenges of identity development, achieving autonomy, and finding belonging (reconnection).

The First Leg of the Adolescent Journey: Identity Development

In trying to determine their identity, adolescents ask themselves, "Who am I?" In enduring a "psychosocial process" as they seek identity, adolescents are constantly attempting to figure out who they are in terms of who they think they are and who others see them to be.[23] They also become concerned at this time about where their lives are going, in what they believe, and how their lives fit into the world around them.[24] Identity formation is a complex process during which time adolescents find themselves in many situations in which differing expectations are placed upon them.[25] Parents may expect

[22] Blos, *The Adolescent Passage*, 148. Blos notes the danger for an adolescent who continues in a state of purposelessness as potential alienation and isolation.

[23] Schwartz argues that there exists an applicable and understudied identity component called "social identity" that "refers to group identifications and to one's assigned and chosen place in the social world, as well as to processes by which one negotiates one's way through the social world." See Seth J. Schwartz, "A New Identity for Identity Research: Recommendations for Expanding and Refocusing the Identity Literature," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20, No. 3 (May 2005), 295, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/20/3/293.full.pdf+html (accessed June, 18, 2013).

[24] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 158.

[25] Academia has recognized the complexity of identity formation to the extent that specific research in this area is captured by the Society for Research on Identity Formation (hereafter, SRIF) which has its own journal. Cote cites over 250 sources in his contribution to the *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. See James Cote, "Identity Formation and Self Development in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Volume 1, 3rd ed., edited by Richard Lerner and Laurence Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2009), 266-304. Identity studies of adolescents also appear in other peer-reviewed journals such as the *Journal of Adolescent Health* and the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, among others.

their adolescents to be obedient to their instructions, yet also expect the youth to think for themselves. Teachers may expect their adolescent students to be fully responsible for determining priorities, but should their assignments not be completed, they may express disappointment in the adolescent or "who they have become." Any number of friends may expect an adolescent to be fully loyal to each of them, regardless of whether or not the actions required by such loyalty will cause the adolescent to betray self-expectations or disappoint another key person in the adolescent's life.

While adolescents are trying to figure out who to be in the sight of all these important people, they are also trying to determine who they are to themselves. The search for identity is so complex and demanding that developmental researchers feel the need to translate theoretical concepts in order to explain their own positions. For example, Montgomery summarizes Erikson's view of identity this way: "Erikson conceptualized a sense of identity as a self-constructed dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and personal history into a coherent and autonomous self that guides the unfolding of one's adult life course."[26] It is no wonder that identity formation is daunting to the developing adolescent.

The complex, full-time task of identity formation consists of internal and external expectations and forces placed upon the young person seeking his or her "true self." Santrock breaks this identity exploration process into three areas: self-understanding, self-esteem, and self-concept. Adolescents striving to understand who they are and what makes them different from others often cite self-descriptors along with notions of the

[26] Marilyn J. Montgomery, "Psychosocial Intimacy and Identity: From Early Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20, no. 3 (May, 2005), 346, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/20/3/346.full.pdf+html (accessed June 12, 2013).

ways in which they believe others observe them. Such descriptors might include those real or imagined such as gender, intelligence level, viewpoints, activities in which the adolescent is involved, hopes and dreams, and other measurable or observable characteristics. Whether real or imagined, an adolescent's developing sense of a unique self is a motivating force in life.[27] Those striving to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship should note that the descriptors that Santrock provides are mainly "external," or based on observance and performance, while healthy Christian identity development is based on knowing one is created individually and uniquely by a loving God.

In their book, *Social Psychology*, Saul Kassin, Steven Fein, and Hazel Rose Markus offer that there are also more internally driven factors to self-understanding called "self-schemas." These are more deeply embedded in one's psyche. For instance, where one self-descriptor may be gender-driven ("I am a girl."), the self-schema would be: "As a girl, do I see myself as 'feminine' or am I more 'masculine'?" Other examples of self-schemas could be independent (versus dependent), open or close-minded, and introverted or extroverted.[28]

Self-understanding for an adolescent helps to answer the basic question, "Who do I think I am?" Other factors that provide midadolescent self-understanding include the roles they inhabit and groups to which they may belong, both formal and informal. Roles can be "currents" that can help adolescents along the journey of individuation or run counter to healthy identity development. Ironically, roles can function as both helpful current and harmful countercurrent. For instance, one may think of herself or himself as

[27] Santrock, *Adolescence*, 135.

[28] Saul Kassin, Steven Fein, and Hazel Rose Markus, *Social Psychology* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2008), 54.

an athlete. Athletic values and endeavors that lead one to see competition developing attributes such as responsibility, teamwork, respect, and health within the adolescent are positive identity contributors. Yet one can imagine (or recall stories about) situations in which athletics forms a current that leads the adolescent to narcissism, selfishness, disrespect, or self-harm.

Groups can also be currents which assist young persons on the adolescent journey or countercurrents that impede healthy development. In his article, "Context and Identity Formation: A Theoretical Analysis and a Case Study," Elli P. Schachter indicates that identity formation, rather than taking place solely amidst the internal adolescent psyche or even within the nuclear family, is affected by wider contexts. While Erickson's identity development theory holds, adolescents also incorporate cultural and contextual influences into their identity development journey, not just those immediate influences such as nuclear family, school systems, and friends. These contextual influences can be strong enough to cause adolescents to "change" their identity to adapt to various situations in which they find themselves. According to Schachter, the individual factors involved in adolescent identity development and the adolescent's wider cultural context are interdependent in forming the adolescent identity.[29]

In his book, *The Ecology of Human Development*, Urie Bronfenbrenner draws a direct correlation between one's self-understood "role" and the role one plays within a group. Bronfenbrenner interprets a "role" to be a position one holds within different groups and society at large. With each role come expectations related to how the person

[29] Elli P. Schachter, "Context and Identity Formation: A Theoretical Analysis and a Case Study," *Journal of Adolescent Research*, no. 20 (May, 2005): 375-395. http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/20/3/375.full.pdf+html (accessed April 4, 2011).

is to act and how the group acts toward the individual. These expectations are determined by both the "content of the activity" and by "the relations between the two parties."[30] The developing adolescent could draw self-understanding, helpful or harmful, from perceived expectations influenced by either of these factors. Multiple groups important to the adolescent can also present a challenge to self-understanding when each demands a different personality from that which the adolescent sees him or herself to be within other groups. This research indicates that youth workers nurturing adolescents toward lifelong discipleship must give ample credence to individuals and settings outside of those that are obvious influencers of youth identity formation.

While self-understanding reflects who midadolescents think themselves to be, self-esteem indicates how well or inferiorly midadolescents think they "measure up" to self-expectations or the expectations of others. Adolescents' level of self- esteem does not always match reality. An adolescent may for instance think herself or himself to be more or less talented, attractive, glib, or intelligent than is measurably accurate. Adolescents are also known to have unwarranted feelings of either superiority or inferiority.[31] In his book, *The Hurried Child*, David Elkind provides an example of this in a phenomena he calls "cognitive conceit."[32] Elkind observed that if children discover their parents to be mistaken, they assume that since the parents were wrong in this instance, then the parents cannot possibly know anything. Similarly, when the child

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[30] Urie Bronfenbrenner, *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 85.

[31] Santrock, *Adolescence*, 142.

[32] David Elkind. *The Hurried Child: Growing Up Too Fast Too Soon*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 129-130.

discovers he or she know something the parent does not, the child then believes he or she must know everything.[33]

There are other external factors found to contribute to "high" or "positive" self-esteem over the adolescent journey. For instance, the level and quality of family communication as well as the level of safety felt by both male and female eighth graders were found to be indicative of their resulting self-esteem during their senior year of high school. Adolescent males who reported that they were involved in a religious community (as opposed to those who were not) were also more likely to have higher self-esteem during their high school years.[34] Both are notable to those who disciple youth.

Santrock's third facet of adolescent identity formation is self-concept. Self-concept is the result of "domain-specific"[35] self-evaluations an adolescent makes in areas such as academics, athletics, appearance, perceived talents, and so on. Practically speaking, this means that an adolescent may be gifted in academics and so develop a positive self-concept in that arena, while possessing little musical ability and therefore having a negative self-concept of herself or himself as a musician. One can then say that self-esteem differs from self-concept in that while self-concept is "domain specific," self-

[33] Elkind. *The Hurried Child*, 129-130..

[34] Susan Birndorf et al., "High Self-esteem among Adolescents: Longitudinal Trends, Sex Differences, and Protective Factors," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 37, issue 3 (September, 2005), 194-202, http://www.jahonline.org/article/S1054-139X(05)00084-4/fulltext#section5 (accessed June 18, 2013). The authors note, "Our findings also suggest that clinicians and community leaders may promote self-esteem in their adolescents by encouraging families, schools, and community organizations to engage teenagers in positive communication and to provide safe and nurturing environments."

[35] "Domain specific" refers to an isolated, unique area of interest, knowledge, or capability independent of other areas. See Psychology Dictionary, s. v. "domain specific knowledge," http://psychologydictionary.org/domain-specific-knowledge/ (accessed June 19, 2013).

esteem considers input from sources external to oneself and is a more global or over-arching self-evaluation.[36]

Though adolescence is a crucial time of identity development, said development does not occur independent of earlier influences. Experiences in one's childhood also affect how adolescents respond to this time period. In her book, *The Developing Person through Childhood and Adolescence*, Kathleen Stassen Berger asserts that adolescents form identity at least partially through remembering those values and lessons given by their parents and culture during childhood. Berger claims adolescents will accept some of those lessons and values and reject others. As they progress, those values, even if rejected, are formative in their psychosocial development. Adolescents determine those values from childhood that they will take forward, those they will build upon, and those to be left behind.[37]

Berger bases her concepts strongly on the work of Erikson, who believed adolescents develop identity by going through "stages," each of which requires a "crisis" of sorts. With regard to human psychosocial development stages, Erikson saw each "crisis" more as a formative turning point for an individual.[38] Without such crises, an adolescent cannot proceed to the next stage in her or his development toward adulthood. In her article titled, "Psychosocial Intimacy and Identity," Marilyn M. Montgomery states, "Erikson conceptualized a sense of identity as a self-constructed dynamic

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[36] Santrock, *Adolescence*, 140.

[37] Kathleen Berger, *The Developing Person through Childhood and Adolescence*, 7th ed. (New York: Worth Publishers, 2006), 496.

[38] For Erikson's view equating the term "crisis" to "turning point" with respect to adolescent development, see Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), 15-16.

organization of drives, abilities, beliefs, and personal history into a coherent and autonomous self that guides the unfolding of one's adult life course."[39]

As evidenced by Montgomery and others, Erikson's theory of psychosocial identity development continues to be a standard considered by contemporary adolescent development research.[40] Consisting of eight stages, each of which must be progressed through in order to successfully navigate the next, Erikson claims one's outlooks coming out of each stage will form his or her viewpoints and approach to life in later stages.

In the first year of life, each individual must develop a basic sense of trust of both oneself and others. This stage determines one's outlook toward the world and others which will be based either on trust or mistrust. So important is this trait that Erikson "regard[s] basic trust as a cornerstone of a vital personality."[41] In roughly years two and three, the crisis or turning point in psychosocial development is autonomy versus doubt and shame. In this stage children ask of themselves, "Is my focus to be 'I' and 'me' or will I act with some concern for others?" Erikson explains, "This stage [therefore] becomes decisive for the ratio between loving good will and hateful self-insistence, between cooperation and willfulness, and between self-expression and compulsive self-

[39] Marilyn J. Montgomery, "Psychosocial Intimacy and Identity: From Early Adolescence to Emerging Adulthood," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 20, no. 3 (May 2005), 347, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/20/3/346.full.pdf+html (accessed June 14, 2013).

[40] See Marilyn J. Montgomery, Wim Beyers, and Inge Seiffge-Krenke, "Does Identity Precede Intimacy? Testing Erikson's Theory on Romantic Development in Emerging Adults of the 21st Century," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25, no. 3 (May 2010): 387-415, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/25/3.toc (accessed June 24, 2013). See also Cote, "Identity Formation and Self Development in Adolescence."

[41] Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 97.

restraint or meek compliance."[42] Stage three, which takes in roughly ages four and five, involves the struggle between initiative and conscience.

Entering the school age, the child develops a sense of industry beneath which lies the concept of initiative. However, the child also develops a sense of inferiority due to the comparisons of himself and herself to others and between his or her own efforts and those of others. This stage is relatively calm and is absent the violent outbursts seen in adolescence. Erickson spoke of this time as the calm before the storm of puberty.

Particularly important to one who is striving to disciple adolescents is the developmental stage in which Erikson defines the "crisis" or turning point, as identity formation versus identity confusion, and the research that has been done in this area since Erikson's exploration of this stage. Adolescents are trying to determine who they really are, somewhat in terms of those whose actions they have observed while needing their own earlier experiences to hold. This is a difficult stage for adolescents and those who care for them. Here Erickson, taking into account Piaget's theory of "egocentricity,"[43] claims that adolescents become "morbidly" concerned with how they appear to others as compared to what they believe about themselves. Elkind theorized that during this egocentric phase, adolescents develop "an imaginary audience," acting and reacting as if others observe their every move.[44] It is a significant phase of intense self-focus and introspection that tends to diminish over the course of midadolescence but which can

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[42] Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 109.

[43] Jean Piaget, *Play, Dreams, and Imitation in Childhood* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1962), 160.

[44] David Elkind and Robert Bowen, "Imaginary Audience Behavior in Children and Adolescence," *Developmental Psychology* 15, no. 1 (January 1979): 38-44, http://psycnet.apa.org/journals/dev/15/1/38.pdf (accessed June 23, 2013).

affect the young person's ability to individuate,[45] as adolescents are both figuring out their identity while feeling as though they must adapt their identity among differing people and situations.

Erikson explains that midadolescents navigating the currents of this stage are very concerned with "how to connect the roles and skills cultivated earlier with the ideal prototypes of the day."[46] Berger believes that "role confusion" in this stage is better defined as "role diffusion." She writes, "Diffusion is not an identity status so much as a lack of status, an absence of self-definition or commitment."[47] Diffused adolescents, explains Berger, exhibit lack of passion or commitment, and take a generally apathetic outlook on life, another potential countercurrent to healthy individuation.

Although Erickson was not researching particularly for the purpose of Christian discipleship of youth, his claims link this period with the faith development of the person, even in the language Erikson uses. This concept is also helpful to those striving to disciple youth. Erikson states,

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[45] See Richard M. Ryan and Rebecca Kuczkowski, "The Imaginary Audience: Self-Consciousness, and Public Individuation in Adolescence," *Journal of Personality* 62, no. 2 (June 1994): 219-238, http://intrinsicmotivation.net/SDT/documents/1994_RyanKuczkowski_JOP.pdf (accessed June 12, 2013). Ryan and Kuczkowski interpret Elkind and Bowen's study as seeing the imaginary audience primarily as a potential threat so that the adolescent may feel they will be exposed to that audience in some negative sense. The authors believe Elkind and Bowen did not fully assess adolescents' potential responses to audiences considered "admiring," or "situations where egocentric thought might facilitate more exhibitionistic tendencies (as opposed to inhibition). In either case, the imaginary audience could interfere with the expression of individuality." Also noteworthy, the results of this study suggest that relationship qualities between parent and child could influence the persistence of critical self-consciousness beyond early adolescence.

[46] Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, 128. Erikson here asserts his "stage theory" very strongly as he goes on to describe how the adolescent must "come to grips again with crises of earlier years before they can install lasting idols and ideals as guardians of a final identity." Midadolescents now need a pause for the integration of the identity elements recognized in their childhood stages. Erickson claims that for midadolescents, "society" is that moratorium.

[47] Berger, *The Developing Person through Childhood and Adolescence*, 497.

> If the earliest stage bequeathed to the identity crisis an important need for *trust* in oneself and in others, then clearly the adolescent looks most fervently for men and ideas to have *faith* in, which also means men and ideas in whose service it would seem worthwhile to prove oneself trustworthy. At the same time, however, the adolescent fears a foolish, all too trusting commitment, and will, paradoxically, express his need for faith in loud cynical mistrust.[48]

It is here that we can see how the searching midadolescent can appear cynical and rebellious while longing for acceptance and direction from those in whom they might place their trust. Clark maintains that adults who are responsible to care for youth must recognize this, but often fail to do so. Clark writes, "For years, adults have blamed adolescents for their rebellion against society and have by neglect pushed adolescents away."[49] Midadolescents needing the support of adults during the adolescent journey see such a reaction as abandonment and respond with mistrust typical of such a traumatic experience.

The last of Erikson's stages and applications to them to be addressed here, because of its relevance to late adolescence, is the intimacy versus distantiation (isolation) stage. The constituent parts of this stage do not work "against" each other as do some of those in previous stages. Rather, Erikson believed that the inability to develop intimacy can cause one to isolate. One can achieve intimate relations[50] with another when the previous stages have been achieved.[51] Adolescents who have not

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[48] Erickson, *Identity*, 129.

[49] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 45.

[50] Healthy intimate relationships can be defined as those in which one has the "willingness to participate in a supportive, tender relationship without losing oneself in the relationship." The term "healthy" can be considered synonymous with "effective functioning in close relationships." See Montgomery, "Psychosocial Intimacy and Identity," 347.

[51] Montgomery indicates that identity formation is a "highly significant predictor of psychosocial intimacy." See Montgomery, "Psychosocial Intimacy and Identity," 365.

formed their identity may, instead of entering into healthy intimate relationships in emerging adulthood, shy away from interpersonal intimacy or throw themselves into acts of intimacy which are promiscuous or guarded (as opposed to being open to the other individual). Where a person does not achieve healthy intimate relationships with others in late adolescence or early adulthood, he or she may settle for false or forced interpersonal relations leading to isolation, precluding one from moving healthily into the belonging (reconnection) phases of the adolescent journey.[52]

While most psychosocial researchers and developmental specialists evaluate "intimacy" in person-to-person terms, findings in this area are significant to those striving to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. There is an aspect of intimacy that requires one to be open to another. This aspect of identity development is important in that without an adolescent being able to open himself or herself to God and to those adults who would provide spiritual care and guidance, there may be little possibility that the adolescent will be able to develop the trust in Jesus upon which discipleship is defined. On the other hand, Christians believe God's Holy Spirit can accomplish anything, and the adolescent who establishes a healthy identity and intimacy could be better able to open herself or himself to both the God of the Universe and a discipler whom God has chosen to care for that adolescent.

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[52] Erikson, *Identity*, 135-136. See also Wim Beyers and Inge Seiffge-Krenke, "Does Identity Precede Intimacy? Testing Erikson's Theory on Romantic Development in Emerging Adults of the 21st Century," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25, no. 3 (May 2010): 387-415, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/25/3.toc (accessed June 24, 2013). Beyers and Seiffge-Krenke's longitudinal study completed in 2010 set out to determine the accuracy of Erikson's theory of intimacy being dependent upon identity achievement. Their results indicated direct links between early ego development in midadolescents (age fifteen) and intimacy in romantic relationships of young adults (age twenty-five).

The Second Leg of the Adolescent Journey: Autonomy

A second major task for the adolescent navigating the journey to individuation is to achieve autonomy. Unlike attaining autonomy in childhood,[53] realizing autonomy in adolescence is the task of accepting responsibility for one's life in answer to the questions, "Do I matter?" and "Do my actions make a difference?"[54] Arnett asserts that achieving adolescent autonomy is "to learn to be independent and self-sufficient, to learn to think for themselves and be responsible for their own behavior."[55] Clark summarizes, "Autonomy can best be described as the ability to make a difference, to choose a life path, and to operate as an agent in the service of society."[56]

As is true for identity formation, achieving autonomy is a very important and complex issue for the adolescent. M. J. Zimmer-Gembeck and W. A. Collins, in their chapter titled, "Autonomy Development During Adolescence," address the importance of autonomy: "Achieving autonomy is one of the key normative psychosocial developmental issues of adolescence, and all perspectives on the development of autonomy emphasize the problematic outcomes that may follow from a lack of

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[53] Erikson cited the second of his "crisis stages" in early childhood development as being "autonomy versus shame and doubt." Erikson believed toddlers want autonomy, or what he called "self-rule" over their actions and the movements of their bodies. If they are not successful in obtaining self-rule, their psychosocial development can be inhibited as the child becomes ashamed of his or her actions or comes to doubt in his or her abilities. This can happen no matter the cause, whether because of actual inabilities or because of too many restrictions from their caretakers. Erikson's research led him to theorize that "parental guidance and protection are crucial for establishing autonomy." See Erikson, *Identity*, 107-114.

[54] Santrock emphasizes that although adolescent individuation signifies normal developmental progress, parents often underestimate and overreact to the intensity of the young person's quest for self-direction and independence by trying to take stronger control of their children's actions. See Santrock, *Adolescence*, 288-289.

[55] Arnett, *Adolescence and Emerging Adulthood*, 183.

[56] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 175.

appropriate support for autonomy."[57] In describing the complexity of this part of the adolescent journey, the authors cited the following factors that affect adolescent autonomy achievement: acts that originate in and are governed by the core person, an adolescent's relationship and response to others, gaining freedom from the restrictions of childhood reliance on others, obtaining the freedom to make choices and pursue goals, and retaining links with friends while increasing his or her own independence.[58] Researchers have difficulty bounding the concept of autonomy in that it encompasses several elements of human behavior such as thought, action, and emotions, while also including concepts inherent in increasing maturity.[59] With all these factors in play, it is difficult for the individuating youth as she or he strives to navigate this particular current in the sea of adolescence.

In order to understand the internal struggle of the adolescent attempting to achieve autonomy, one might think of the young person like a seaplane. While attempting to navigate the current of autonomy, this "adolescent seaplane" is trying to keep its floats in the water while also wishing to engage its wings. It is during this stage of the journey—as adolescents seemingly wish to remain attached to their family unit and the identity they have forged so far among that family—that they are simultaneously pushing for the independence necessary to individuate through achieving autonomy.

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[57] M. J. Zimmer-Gembeck and W. A. Collins, "Autonomy Development during Adolescence," in *Blackwell Handbook of Adolescence*, edited by G. R. Adams and M. Berzonsky (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2003), 175-204, www.sdrs.info/publications.php (accessed July 1, 2013).

[58] Ibid.

[59] Zimmer-Gembeck and Collins, "Autonomy Development during Adolescence," 175-204.

The group dynamic combines with the internal processing the adolescent is undergoing to add to the complexity of the adolescent's striving to realize autonomy. Clark states that in attempting to achieve autonomy, the adolescent enters a stage of self-reflection that "provides the internal structure for developing the confidence to trust the answers that emerge from the process."[60] Autonomy also occurs as adolescents become less and less attached to parents, no longer idealizing them but minimizing their own need for emotional support and depending more on their own judgment.[61] While depending less and less upon parents, peers become more important in the adolescent's questioning, "Do I matter?" and "Do my actions make a difference?" Parents are often surprised at the importance of the peer group to the adolescent who is striving for autonomy, and how determined young people are to become independent among and with the help of their friends. It would seem readily apparent that family functioning could be a positive "current" in aiding autonomy achievement or it could be a negative "countercurrent" that inhibits such. Judy Garber and Stephanie A. Little, in their article, "Emotional Autonomy and Adolescent Adjustment," found that emotional autonomy appears to yield more positive results in young adolescent offspring (age 14.5 years) of "psychiatrically well mothers" when those midadolescents had an emotionally supportive

[60] Chap Clark, "The Changing Face of Adolescence: A Theological View of Human Development," in *Starting Right: Thinking Theologically About Youth Ministry*, edited by Kenda Creasy Dean, Chap Clark, and Dave Rahn (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 55.

[61] Fuhrman and Holmbeck conclude that a "high emotional autonomy" is indicative of an adolescent's attempts to emotionally detach from one's parents. Teresa Fuhrman and Grayson N. Holmbeck, "A Contextual-Moderator Analysis of Emotional Autonomy and Adjustment in Adolescence," *Child Development* 66, no. 3 (June 1995), 793-811, http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/1131951?uid=2&uid=4&sid=21103226362283 (accessed July 1, 2013).

context.[62] Fuhrman and Holmbeck conclude that family interactions such as "maternal warmth, family cohesion, parental control, and conflict intensity" are all indicators of adolescent autonomy attainment.[63]

Those nurturing youth toward lifelong discipleship should be aware that adolescents are trying to navigate this current of autonomy attainment from a limited experiential perspective. Clark and Clark call the guiding factor in an adolescent's search for autonomy "egocentric abstraction." The Clarks' research indicates that adolescents are limited in their ability to perceive life. That is, adolescents are viewing life through lenses of self-interest and protection, saying one thing while actually meaning another and often acting defensive as they strive "to matter." To compound the difficulty of this portion of the journey, adults often inhibit the autonomy attainment of their children by being overprotective. In the quest for independence, adolescents try to free themselves of mandatory compliance with parental or other caretaker rules largely through accomplishment. "What they say [is], 'I can do it.' What they mean [is], 'I long to matter.'"[64]

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[62] Judy Garber and Stephanie A. Little, "Emotional Autonomy and Adolescent Adjustment," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 16, no. 4 (July 2001) 367, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/16/4/355.full.pdf+html (accessed June 24, 2013).

[63] Fuhrman and Holmbeck, "A Contextual-Moderator Analysis."

[64] Chap Clark and Dee Clark, "Learning the Language of Longings: The 6 Keys to a Young Person's Heart," *YouthWorker Journal* XXIII (July/August 2007): 28-29. Clark and Clark also assert that adults inhibit adolescent autonomy because adults have difficulty letting midadolescents make their own mistakes, believing they (adults) possess experiential wisdom which says midadolescents' mistakes will surely result in failure.

The concept of "egocentric abstraction" is so significant during midadolescence that the Clarks call it "the defining characteristic of midadolescence."[65] Early adolescence ends and midadolescence begins when a child develops the cognitive ability to think abstractly rather than concretely. However, because of the extension of the adolescent journey, midadolescents are propelled into a period where though they have the capacity to think abstractly, they do not yet possess the cognitive abstract capability to reflect thoughtfully on relationship and life issues, nor can they process information completely. Midadolescents then can understand that their actions impact others, but they cannot yet process the "why" behind actions of others that affect them, especially actions that affect them in negative ways. Midadolescents can feel alone as they realize that they are beyond childhood, as they attempt to figure out who they are, whether they matter, and where they belong, and as they understand that those upon whom they depend have not always been dependable while others have let them down consistently. Clark and Clark write, "The pain is so raw, the daunting nature of the lengthy task before them so discouraging, and the intense sense of aloneness and vulnerability so palpable that the only way a midadolescent can deal with their life experience is through *egocentric abstraction*. To be blunt, a midadolescent is at least somewhat aware that their life impacts others even as others impact them, but *they don't have the resources or energy to care*."[66]

Midadolescents will express themselves in what some adults might consider shocking ways in order to attempt to gain autonomy or to prove they are already

[65] Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 136-139.

[66] Ibid, 138.

autonomous. In 2007, youth culture specialist Paul Robertson began interviewing adolescents to find reasons why they obtained tattoos. Robertson tells the story of a midadolescent girl who got a tattoo of a small tree on her right shoulder. In explaining why she wore the tattoo, the young woman explained that her father had planted a tree in their yard when she was born in honor of her. Even though she felt her father was always proud of her, he left when she was ten. She explained that she got the tattoo when she turned sixteen to always remind herself that for a time in her life, she was important to her father.[67]

Richard Lerner, in his book, *The Good Teen*, asserts that adults beyond parents act and speak toward adolescents in ways that are alienating, further inhibiting a healthy journey to autonomy:

> All too often, parents have acted as if the only important aspects of their children's behaviors were those that caused problems. We think of adolescence as a time of storm and stress. Scientists too, have regarded young people as lacking, as deficient, as unable to behave correctly and in a healthy manner. We characterize them as dangerous to others and as endangered themselves (because of their self-destructive behaviors). Some teens become convinced that their parents are just waiting to discover incriminating evidence or are always on the verge of asking invasive and accusatory questions: "Are you smoking cigarettes? Are you smoking dope? Are you having sex?"[68]

In their chapter titled, "Attachment and Autonomy during Adolescence," Kathleen Boykin McElhaney, Joseph P. Allen, Claire Stephenson, and Amanda L. Hare state that adolescent attempts to achieve autonomy are more positively facilitated by supportive, responsive parenting as opposed to adolescents who are over-controlled by parents as

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[67] Paul Robertson, "Tattoos: A Skin-Deep Reflection of Adolescent Life," *YouthWorker Journal* XXIV (September/October 2007): 54.

[68] Richard Lerner, *The Good Teen: Rescuing Adolescents from the Myths of Storm and Stress Years* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2007), 3, 7.

described by Lerner above.[69] The authors claim that in healthy families, the parent-adolescent relationship is "transformed but not detached" as the adolescent strives to attain autonomy. Transformed parent-adolescent relationships would be those where the parents are supportive and cautiously trusting but available and instructive rather than fully disconnected and isolated from their children. Clark maintains that such an approach on the part of parents helps enable adolescents to make autonomous decisions based in a thought process of "I know who I am" rather than "I'm going to decide based on who someone else expects me to be."[70]

Ultimately, autonomy deals with how adolescents insert themselves into the world and what adolescents feel they take into the world that will make a difference. A person has achieved autonomy when that person believes he or she can enter into a situation and impact that situation. Youth workers striving to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship must consider ways to rethink and reinvent their ministries in ways that will counter autonomy-inhibiting actions, help adolescents attain autonomy, and help families of those adolescents do the same.[71] While being aware of the pitfalls inherent in the adolescent journey through attaining autonomy, disciplers must acknowledge and encourage positive efforts of adolescents so those adolescents see that they do matter.

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[69] Kathleen Boykin McElhaney, Joseph P. Allen, Claire Stephenson, and Amanda L. Hare, "Attachment and Autonomy during Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Volume 1, 3rd ed., edited by Richard Lerner and Laurence Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2009), 360, 368.

[70] Clark, "Psychosocial Development of Adolescents."

[71] Youth disciplers should also consider how to nurture adolescents toward healthy, positive autonomy from a Christian standpoint. Keeping in mind Clark's definition of autonomy in a psychosocial sense, healthy autonomy development from a Christian standpoint might be defined as the adolescent asking, "Can I enter into a life situation and impact that situation for the furthering of God's Kingdom and for the good of others rather than in ways that solely benefit me?" The terms "healthy" and "positive" with respect to autonomy would then be understood from a Christo-centric definition.

The Third Leg of the Adolescent Journey: Belonging/Reconnection

"Maybe I'm something special, and maybe I'm not. Maybe I'm here for a reason and I might be going somewhere after this, but then again I might not. I wonder where I fit in."[72] In writing a piece about "the spirit of youth" in his high school yearbook, Thomas Hine, then age sixteen, unknowingly addressed the three crucial questions asked by young persons as they attempt to navigate the currents and countercurrents of the adolescent journey. Identity formation asks "Who am I?" Autonomy achievement asks, "Do I matter" and "What can I contribute?" As the late adolescent moves toward adulthood along the third leg of the adolescent journey, belonging or reconnection, she or he asks, as did Hine, "Where do I fit in?" or "Where do I belong?"[73]

At this stage, the young person's cognition, having become more fully abstract, provides her or him with ability to consider why others act the way they do and to understand hurtful actions toward them may actually not have been "about them." Midadolescents in the midst of egocentric abstraction do not yet have this capability.[74] This recognition is significant as the adult in the person begins to "emerge," having moved from full dependence in childhood, through a search for independence as the young person progressed through early and midadolescence, to seeking interdependence with others. There are currents and countercurrents that exist to help the late adolescent navigate this part of the journey and those which can constrain further development.

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[72] Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Perennial, 1999), 2.

[73] While realizing their own actions matter and affect others, late adolescents also have the cognitive capacity and psychosocial awareness to realize how the needs and perspectives of others matter. See Clark and Clark, *Disconnected*, 156-157.

[74] See Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 17-20.

The need for belonging itself is a current in favorable direction. Even in the earlier stages of identity formation and autonomy attainment, adolescents look to link with others, a trait that for decades scholars have termed significant to adolescent development.[75] In her book, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, Sharon Daloz Parks contends that everyone in each period of life depends on tangible "networks of belonging."[76] One part of such a network is the people whom one knows and recognizes as being important to their lives. Another network might be people who provide meaning to one's life as well, but these people are often overlooked or not seen at all. Parks believes finding such networks in the search for belonging is what enables one to flourish in life, so the drive to belong is inherent and the quality of resulting interaction between the person and her or his social world a significant part of development.[77]

Psychology professor Roy F. Baumeister and his colleagues have found that the need to belong is pervasive over many cultures and life circumstances and is so inherent that it affects many critical human operational aspects such as emotional patterns and cognitive processes.[78] In their chapter, "Gender Development in Adolescence," Nancy L. Galambos, Sheri A. Bernenbaum, and Susan M. McHale assert that people possess a

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[75] B. Bradford Brown and James Larson, "Peer Relationships in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Volume 2, 3rd ed., edited by Richard Lerner and Laurence Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2009): 74-103.

[76] Sharon Daloz Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000), 89.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Roy F. Baumeister and Mark R. Leary, "The Need to Belong: Desire for Interpersonal Attachment as a Fundamental Human Motivation," *Psychological Bulletin* 117, no. 3 (1995): 520. See also Roy F. Baumeister, Jean M. Twenge, and Christopher K. Nuss, "Effects of Social Exclusion on Cognitive Processes: Anticipated Aloneness Reduces Intelligent Thought," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 83, no. 4 (2002): 817–827; and Roy F. Baumeister et al., "Thwarting the Need to Belong: Understanding the Interpersonal and Inner Effects of Social Exclusion," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 1, no.1 (2007): 506-520.

sense of connectedness ("we-ness") that facilitates belonging with others in a group and that this dynamic enhances self-esteem and influences behavior.[79] Clark maintains that adolescents are eager to have relationships with adults, even in a culture of abandonment that has largely created adolescent mistrust of those older.[80] In their book, *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith and Melissa Lundquist Denton propose that some adolescents who feel abandoned by the adults in their lives may even have a hunger for meaningful relationships with those same adults, desiring especially the boundaries, wisdom, teaching, and direction mature adults have to offer.[81] Patrick J. Sullivan and Reed W. Larson, in their article, "Connecting Youth to High-Resource Adults," discuss their finding that adolescents' engagement even with adults who are unknown to them is seen as positive when the adult treats the adolescent not as "equal," but with respect, showing a willingness to share knowledge and resources that could help the adolescent reach adulthood.[82]

The search for belonging also contains challenging countercurrents. Adolescents are in yet another developmental stage where they are again faced with complexities not readily apparent to either themselves or to adults who would nurture them toward a

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[79] Nancy L. Galambos, Sheri A. Bernenbaum, and Susan M. McHale, "Gender Development in Adolescence," in *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*, Volume 1, 3rd ed., edited by Richard Lerner and Laurence Steinberg (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2009), 335. With respect to the authors' reference to "belonging" being tied to self-esteem, a portion of the adolescent journey addressed earlier, Santrock also contends that facets of identity exploration are addressed by the individual in late adolescence. See Santrock, *Adolescence*, 17.

[80] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 38.

[81] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 186.

[82] Patrick J. Sullivan and Reed W. Larson, "Connecting Youth to High-Resource Adults: Lessons from Effective Youth Programs," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 25, no. 1 (January 2010), 99-123, http://jar.sagepub.com.naomi.fuller.edu:2048/content/25/1/99.full.pdf+html (accessed July 6, 2013).

lifetime of trusting Christ. Late adolescents have been subjected to the natural search for identity and autonomy that is a central part of the adolescent journey. Much of these processes entail features of individuality in the sense that the adolescent is forming their identity and considering that they can and do have an individual impact on their surroundings and on those who care about them. In a sense, so far the journey has been about them. In the search for belonging, interdependence now becomes a prominent current.

Late adolescents ask themselves a crucial question about belonging and reconnection: "Do I continue to ride the current of individuality or do I focus the portion of my found identity and my recognized ability to affect others within and for the good of community?" An added challenge to the late adolescent's thinking is that he or she lives in and under the influence of a culture that emphasizes and encourages individual achievement and desires.[83] Clark summarizes, "In a culture that elevates personal accomplishment and individual responsibility over mutual support and communal living, growing adolescents find themselves faced with an inescapable conundrum: is it more valuable to learn how to stand tall as a capable individual or to learn how to recognize my need for others and their need for me?"[84]

The adolescent journey does not have a nice, tidy, clear endpoint. The journey remains complex as the late adolescent searches for belonging and interdependence. There are internally focused definitions of when one moves from adolescence into

[83] For examples of cultural influences see Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, especially Chapters 6 and 9, Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, Chapter 3, and Denise Pope Clark, *Doing School* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).

[84] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 182. See also Parks, *Big Questions, Worthy Dreams*, 91.

adulthood based on psychosocial development as well as external measures applied by those who favor external indicators such as status and achievement. Even in an ideal world, defining the adolescent journey itself and determining its endpoint would be a difficult one. But the situation is not ideal. Western culture, which some contend "invented" adolescence in the first place,[85] presents countercurrents to the journeyer attempting to navigate his or her way from late adolescence into the "home port" of adulthood.

Adolescent Abandonment: Western Culture's Obstruction to Individuation

The process of individuation is taking contemporary adolescents longer to navigate.[86] Arnett states plainly, "Emerging adulthood developed in part because young people enter adult roles of stable work, marriage, and parenthood later now than they did in the past, leading many older people to view them as 'late' or selfish, and the new features of this new life stage are frequently misunderstood and misinterpreted." Believing that emerging adulthood will be a permanent additional developmental stage to the life sequence because identity development occurs even more strongly in emerging adult years (Arnett cites ages eighteen to twenty-five) than in adolescence,[87] Arnett

[85] Robert Epstein is an example of one who contends that adolescence is an invention of industrialized Western cultures where consumerism abounds. For examples of comparisons between child-raising practices in the United States and pre-industrialized cultures and nations where the concept of "adolescence" does not exist, see Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families from the Torment of Adolescence* (Fresno, CA: Quill Driver Books, 2010), 75-94.

[86] See Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 11. Also see Valerie F. Reyna et al., *The Adolescent Brain: Learning, Reasoning, and Decision Making* (Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association, 2012), 4 and Patricia Cohen, "Long Road to Adulthood is Growing Even Longer," *New York Times*, June 12, 2010, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/13/us/13generations.html?_r=0 (accessed July 6, 2013).

[87] Jeffrey Arnett, "Oh, Grow Up! Generational Grumbling and the New Life Stage of Emerging Adulthood—Commentary on Trzesniewski & Donnellan," *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 5: 35, http://www.jeffreyarnett.com/ohgrowuppps2010.pdf (accessed June 11, 2012).

contends that contemporary culture has proclaimed a "psychosocial moratorium" on becoming an adult, extending a grace period of sorts with little expectations of young twenty-somethings to contribute. Belated marriages due to birth control and extended searching in areas such as love and education postpones emerging adults from taking on roles and responsibilities previously expected of this age group. Arnett argues that this life period provides emerging adults optimum opportunity to explore who they are and who they wish to be. For those afforded the opportunity to do such, emerging adults are in prime years to explore education and career opportunities as well as love relationships before taking on responsibilities they characterize as "adult."[88]

While one might interpret Arnett's contentions as "nature of the beast" due to contemporary culture's natural influence on psychosocial adolescent development, other developmental specialists and researchers assert that something more systemically designed is in play. Smith and Denton identify a "structural disconnect" between adolescents and the adult world.[89] While adolescents developing toward adulthood have in the past for the most part have been under the watchful care of adults, cultural developments in response to the Industrial Revolution, chief among them the establishment of the public education system in the United States, have served to segregate American youth from the adult world.[90] Without caring adults to assist developing young persons, the confusion of the adolescent journey has intensified. Smith

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[88] Jeffrey Jensen Arnett, *Emerging Adulthood: The Winding Road from Late Teens through the Early Twenties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 8.

[89] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 182-186.

[90] Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 3-23.

and Denton write, "The cultural message to youth is that they are not mature or prepared enough to enter the adult world and so must continue for years to wait, even as other powerful, contradictory messages implore them to act fully responsibly, be self-directed, and make very good choices as independent decision makers."[91]

The betrayal on the part of American adults toward adolescents has not come only from dispassionate corporate entities like "education systems" or corporations, although these have been part of the abandonment of American adolescents, but also from living, breathing human beings as close to adolescents as their immediate family members.[92] Hine states that parents feel "alienated" by their children, while those children report feeling "abandoned" by their parents.[93] Elkind describes how familial pressures of those living in Western cultures can cause even well-meaning parents to rear their children in such ways that can cause adolescents to feel "abandoned."[94] Elkind calls such children "hurried." Hurried children feel abandoned due to such factors as parents underestimating the stresses placed on contemporary youth in areas like school, work, negative media influences, and parents overestimating children's status of emotional and psychosocial development and their coping abilities. Elkind's list covers much of life for a developing adolescent. In a later study of family relationships, Elkind found that

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[91] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 184.

[92] Diana R. Garland, *Family Ministry: A Comprehensive Guide*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2012), 34, 35. See also Amy Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey: An Interdisciplinary Approach to Youth Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2011), 88-90.

[93] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*, 25.

[94] Elkind, *The Hurried Child*.

stresses on the family were directly transferred to offspring.[95] Families are now more often "adult-centered" rather than being "child-centered" as had been true in the past. Children are expected to have the wherewithal to be able to go it alone, possessing the competencies of adults without regard for the fact that adolescents have neither the cognition nor experience necessary to function as such. This false sense of autonomy placed on adolescents from a society that has not provided them with the adult guidance, support, and direction needed is further abandonment of the young.

To those striving to disciple adolescents, it is apparent that American culture has abandoned its youth. This hurtful betrayal has resulted in an adolescent experience untenable for many youth that has led to profound mistrust of adults from which it will be difficult to recover. Robert D. Putnam, who found that children and adolescents not supported by and through adult relationships are more susceptible to behavioral and emotional problems, places the blame squarely on American society created by adults. In his book, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, Putnam contends that America's youth carry a social distrust that "should be seen not as a character flaw, but rather as a mirror held up to social mores of recent decades. Our youth are, in effect, telling us that in their experience most people really aren't trustworthy."[96]

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[95] David Elkind, *Ties That Stress: The New Family Imbalance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

[96] Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000), 141-142.

In response to being largely abandoned by the adult world, adolescents have turned to one another for safety, support, and meaning. In her book, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence*, Patricia Hersch notes that the absence of caring adults has created a vacuum in which the young have built their own communities where they now navigate the currents and countercurrents of the adolescent journey.[97] Within this isolated community, adolescents form their own meaning systems huddle together for safety. Clark calls this created adolescent environment "the world beneath."[98]

The world beneath is a district for adolescents only. Adults are not welcome. This is not because deep down adolescents do not wish for meaningful relationships with caring adults who have much to offer. They do. Rather it is because adolescents feel they have been let down so often by adults that they are not willing to risk being betrayed yet again.

Not trusting to look for help from adults anymore, the "world beneath" offers what adolescents believe to be the safest place to navigate the journey. Here they look to one another to figure out who they are (identity). Adolescents strive to be an important member of a "cluster" of like-minded peers where they can "matter" and "contribute" (autonomy), explains Clark. The abandonment they now recognize as they have entered into abstract thinking of midadolescence creates a sense of relational starvation which they believe will best be answered by others in a place hidden from the adults who have

[97] Patricia Hersch, *A Tribe Apart: A Journey into the Heart of American Adolescence* (New York: Random House, 1998), 21.

[98] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 43-56. While Hersch describes a "community" formed by adolescents in response to being abandoned by the adult population, Clark speaks in more detailed terms of the intense and enduring pain to adolescents caused by abandonment and the resulting deep mistrust of adults.

caused this deep hurt (reconnection). There are however many adults who care deeply about these adolescent journeyers who inhabit the world beneath. Sadly, many adolescents just no longer believe this to be true.

Those who would nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship have a monumental task before them. Winning the trust of those navigating the currents and countercurrents of the adolescent journey will involve a sustained, dedicated, trustworthy effort to see and reach beyond the harsh veneer with which adolescents have painted themselves in response to abandonment from the adult world. However, by reflecting and revealing the penetrating love of Jesus the Christ to hurt and abandoned adolescents, the Church is uniquely gifted and positioned by God to answer the deepest longings of the young in such a culture. The Church is called for such a time and task as this.

CHAPTER 2

BACKGROUND OF ST. PAUL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

This chapter will begin by introducing the United Methodist Church (hereafter, the UMC). The UMC is a denominational Church adhering to Wesleyan theology, that is, theology that has as its foundations God's grace or unmerited favor, ever-present and ever-available to humankind. United Methodist theology purports that a person is saved from sin, reconciled to God, and molded into a person of purpose for the continuance and building up of God's kingdom by God's grace through one's faith in God throughout one's life. The UMC operates to accomplish its mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world through local churches. St. Paul is one such local church.

The United Methodist Church

The United Methodist Church can draw upon on two if its core beliefs to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship of Jesus Christ through a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. The first core belief is that the mission of the Church is to

make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.[1] The other is the UMC's understanding of grace as "the undeserved, unmerited, and loving action of God in human existence through the ever-present Holy Spirit."[2] United Methodists believe all those who call themselves Christians are called by God to make disciples. United Methodists also believe all persons are recipients of God's grace in the person of Jesus Christ, who is God's word revealed in flesh, who is the Head of the Church, the one in whom the Church trusts for salvation, and for abundant eternal life. The Church strives to make disciples of all people from hearts of love, thankfulness, and trust in Jesus who died to save humankind from separation from God though all are unworthy. Those adults who know Jesus as Savior and know God's love as transformative are joyfully and hopefully responsible to disciple the young in their care into lifelong trusting followers of Jesus.[3]

Wesleyan Theological Roots

The UMC is a connectional church practicing Wesleyan theology, from which the church worships, grows, and serves. *Connectional* means that no UMC congregation stands alone in practicing ministry nor does any congregation "govern" itself independently. While concentrating on ministry within the local community where each congregation has been placed by God, each congregation is also part of the larger

[1] United Methodist Church, *United Methodist Handbook* (Nashville: United Methodist Communications, 2009), 4.

[2] Neil M Alexander, ed., *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2012), 87.

[3] General Board of Discipleship, *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), 34-35.

denomination which is made up of worshipping, serving congregations across the planet. The polity or governmental style of the UMC is what secular society might refer to as hierarchical, being overseen by bishops who have authority over conferences, identified according to each of those conference's geographical locations.[4]

Wesleyan theology is built on the theological concept of God's grace toward humankind. Methodists define salvation as a result of that grace through faith in Jesus the Christ. Salvation to Wesleyans differs somewhat from other Christian denominations in that Wesleyans believe that salvation is a lifelong journey. Salvation occurs as persons accept God's molding of their lives, minds, and hearts to be closer to that of God's will for humankind. Wesleyans' thankful response to God's grace is critical evidence that they are progressing in their salvation or "being sanctified."[5] That is, United Methodists believe that discipleship demands active participation in God's kingdom on earth, especially in the care of others whom society has set aside. This type of active faith in thankfulness to God's grace of salvation is paramount to Wesleyan's understanding of being Christian. Said another way, Wesleyans believe evidence of a living faith and trust in Jesus as Savior manifests in works of service to God that helps others. While Wesleyans' faith calls them to live in ways that show they trust Jesus for all parts of their

[4] For a complete description of the organization and polity of the UMC, see Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, especially the "Division Two-Organization" section.

[5] Some Protestant denominations define "being saved" as accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord of one's life, and those denominations refer to that moment as *salvation*. Wesleyan theology refers to the instance of accepting Christ as *justification*. That is, the individual is then "justified before God" by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. Wesleyans assert that *salvation* is a lifelong journey of *sanctification*, where a justified person is striving to become more and more like Jesus Christ in all aspects of his or her life. This striving is evidenced by Christian acts in service to God and others. See George E. Koehler, *The United Methodist Member's Handbook* (Nashville; Discipleship Resources, 1989), 78-79.

lives, Wesleyans are also responsible to tell others why they live in ways that exhibit such trust.

Crucial to embracing a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry that nurtures adolescents toward lifelong discipleship is for one to understand the Wesleyan concept of grace. Especially key is Wesley's notion of prevenient grace. Prevenient grace is God's grace that "goes before." Wesleyans believe that God's grace precedes one's knowledge of one's need for God. People begin the faith journey in a state of sin. Each person's primary focus is with himself or herself, or some other of "the created." People are neither aware that their focus is on themselves or aware of their need for God's grace. However, God's prevenient grace lovingly and assertively surrounds, calls, leads, and even woos persons to the knowledge of God and their own sinful state. Through God's prevenient grace, God calls people to realize their need for the atoning blood of Jesus Christ. People are reconciled to God by accepting God's prevenient grace that leads them to confess their sins and accept Jesus as Lord. Understanding that God's prevenient grace reaches to all will help enable a youth ministry team to embrace an adoptive approach to youth ministry that incorporates discipling, nurturing, and even "holy pursuit" of adolescents in order to disciple them for lifelong commitment to following Jesus.

Wesleyans' focus on doing good works in thankfulness for Jesus's sacrificial love that paid for the sins of humankind can be mistaken for trying to earn one's way to salvation. Wesleyans do not do good works for such a purpose. Good works, even those on behalf of adolescents, do not "justify" or "save" one from the penalty of sin. Wesleyan theology, built upon the premise that humankind is saved by God's grace

through faith in Jesus Christ, alleges that Christ's sacrifice upon the cross pays the penalty for the sins of all. The term used by United Methodists for this realization of their need for Jesus' sacrifice and acceptance of Christ as savior is *justification*. The premise of justification is that Christ's payment "justifies" persons before a holy, perfect God. However, United Methodists also follow the teaching of John Wesley that proposes faith in Jesus as Lord of all and as Lord of one's life is revealed by one's actions to care for others for whom Christ also died. This foundational belief of Wesley was formed early in his own faith journey and in that of his brother Charles.

Formative in the spiritual lives of John and Charles Wesley, who together founded a movement at Christ Church College called "The Holy Club," was their part in the formation of that group of student ministers.[6] Troubled by the rampant cheating taking place by students at the institution, Charles Wesley gathered peers who wished to change the culture of the college. The group began as a Bible study group who refused to join the "current" of academic dishonesty being practiced by many of their peers. The group came under intense pressure to conform at which point Charles wrote to his brother John for assistance. John Wesley arrived to encourage the group. As they gathered for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship, the Holy Club members soon discovered many needs within their immediate community. The Holy Club members, believing they were following Christ's instruction, began to answer those needs by visiting the local prison and feeding the poor. This experience formed the basis of the Wesleyan emphasis on

[6] Today one might call the Holy Club a "campus ministry."

social justice.[7] "Wesley's passion for the social outreach activities of the club (are) actions which were foundational to his understanding of faith works and which remain foundational to the way Methodists practice our Christianity today."[8] As Clark did in his groundbreaking work on the psychosocial status of American youth, *Hurt 2.0*, one can make a case for American adolescents being among "the last, least, and lost" to whom the Church is to reach out to include and disciple.[9]

Reaching to a generation who feels abandonment in order to disciple them is not a new thing to those having roots in Wesleyan understanding of faith and salvation. Such efforts were at the beginning of the Methodist movement in the United States when this country was also being formed. Methodism took root in the colonies during the American Revolution. The Methodist movement was an attempt by John Wesley and his followers, not to establish a new Church, but to bring about what Wesley believed to be a renewal of faith within the established Church of England.[10] As the Revolution began, before Methodism had separated to become an independent Church, American colonists found themselves abandoned when the Church of England viewed them as traitors to the throne. That the colonists would not be given the sacraments, such as Holy Communion and Baptism, by the Anglican Church was untenable to pastors in the Methodist movement. Going against the authority of both the Church of England and Wesley

[7] See Elesha Coffman, "Attack of the Bible Moths," *Christian History* 20, Issue 1 (February 2001): 20; see also Richard P. Heitzenrater, "A Tale of Two Brothers," *Christian History* 20, Issue 1 (February 2001): 10.

[8] Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), 90.

[9] See Clark, *Hurt 2.0*.

[10] Jack M. Tuell. *The Organization of The United Methodist Church: 2002 Edition* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2002), 13.

himself, several ministers within the Methodist movement "ordained themselves" and began to give sacraments to worshippers who supported the revolution.[11] Wesley was also soon to break from the Church of England, ordaining other ministers in the Methodist movement to make disciples of Jesus for the transformation of the world among those abandoned by the Church of England. Reaching abandoned children of God is in the original fabric of Wesleyan theology and faith.

The UMC Today and the *Book of Discipline*

Today, however, the UMC needs to closely examine and reframe its approach to youth ministry as the means to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. The *Book of Discipline* of the UMC, the Church's book of governance to which local churches and their pastors look for guidance, reveals a deep concern for adolescents and their inclusion in Christ's Church. However, the *Book of Discipline* also exposes the Church's limited view of how to nurture youth as present and potential disciples by caring for the needs of postmodern adolescents. Exhorting the Church to have a "comprehensive approach to development and implementation of youth ministry programming at all levels of the Church," the *Book of Discipline* communicates fundamentals of an adoptive approach to discipling adolescents.[12] It instructs United Methodist churches that churches are to focus on "understanding the primary task of youth ministry: to love youth where they are, to encourage them with opportunities for nurture and growth, and to challenge them to respond to God's call to serve in their

[11] Frederick A. Norwood. *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 90-93.

[12] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 158.

communities."[13] All adult leaders, from pastor to parents, godparents, sponsors, and guardians to teachers, officers, and "all members of the congregation," are called upon to be part of discipling children in ways that "will lead to a personnel commitment to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and to an understanding of the Christian faith."[14] One could argue that such instruction invokes an intergenerational and all-of-the-Church approach to discipling their young. Youth are to be included and chosen using the same standards as are adults to contribute to and serve on Church governing bodies. Children's ministries are to advocate for children's needs and provide for faith development, safety, and discipleship of preadolescents. All these are positive standards in urging the Church to care for their young.

In exhorting those United Methodists who would nurture adolescents for lifelong discipleship, the *Book of Discipline* will, however, need to become better at instructing churches to keep up with recent adolescent development research in order to assist youth workers in nurturing adolescents toward lifelong discipleship by communicating a hermeneutic of adoption to the churches. Using the term "programming" rather than choosing more adoptive terms to describe discipleship is an indicator of the need to better understand the needs of contemporary youth. There is an obvious absence of the issue of extended adolescence as "youth" are defined as those between the ages of twelve and eighteen.[15]

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[13] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 598.

[14] Ibid., 158.

[15] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 598. The editor acknowledges that the selected age range is that typical of adolescents in public middle and high schools, with some exceptions. However this approach ignores more recent developmental findings and issues that

While it uses terminology such as "acceptance," "encouragement," "nurture," "discipleship," and "growth" in its comprehensive description of how youth ministry is to be facilitated, the *Book of Discipline* addresses as its first order of ministry to youth that they are to contribute to the Youth Service Fund,[16] stating that the UMC is "challenging youth to assume their financial responsibility in connection with the local church budget."[17] Local church youth councils are instructed to encourage local church and denominational efforts among adolescents who will make up the youth ministry. Instructing churches how to initiate and facilitate youth ministry programmatically in organizational terms, the *Book of Discipline* moves immediately into fostering denominational and local church loyalty instead of encouraging and instructing congregations to disciple youth through relational, adoptive, intergenerational means.

Early Youth Ministry Efforts in the UMC

Even though it is difficult to craft an instruction manual that covers all aspects of nurturing adolescents toward lifelong discipleship, early youth ministry efforts in Methodism revealed a constructively critical look at how youth ministry was being facilitated. The Reverend John Bunyon Robinson began to wonder if it could be that the Methodist Church had initially placed expectations upon youth for which the Church had not adequately prepared them. Taking up this challenge, Robinson created a ministry for,

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both early and late adolescence have expanded to earlier and later ages respectively, as explained in Chapter 1.

[16] The Youth Service Fund is a fund collected by conference youth organizations within each geographical "annual conference" for benevolent projects both within and beyond that particular annual conference. See United Methodist Church, *United Methodist Youth Fellowship Handbook* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1986), 20.

[17] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 486.

with, to, and through late adolescents which came to be known as "The Epworth League." Robinson believed ministry efforts of the Church at that time were more focused on entertainment than discipleship. Robinson states, "Heretofore we have been organizing young people for amusement and entertainment. . . . The things at which we set them did not help them to know how to work for Christ."[18]

A review of the Epworth League's operational manual reveals a forward-thinking intergenerational mentorship model for youth ministry. The focused efforts of the League's adult mentors were to nurture late adolescents in their discipleship journey in ways that deliberately included young persons in the work of the Church. Robinson believed that work, for Christ's sake and for that of the Church, was not only a critical piece of discipleship, but that it was a source of joy for the worker as well. Robinson writes, "Another secret of the ages has come to light in our day . . . Christian enjoyment and growth are in exact proportion to Christian work." [19]

The Epworth League's approach was a somewhat unique view of devotion to the young at the time. The Epworth League did not see the "Christian work" at the center of its model as a means to assign tasks and garner cheap labor. Rather the text of the league's manual discloses the author's belief that the Church body was fully responsible for the nurture of late adolescents. Some of that nurture by way of working side by side was focused on helping late adolescents navigate a period in life that Robinson saw as particularly tempting through encouraging their involvement in the life of the Church.

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[18] J. B. Robinson, *The Epworth League—Its Place in Methodism: A Manual* (Cincinnati: Curtis and Jennings, 1890), 117, Google e-book.

[19] Robinson, *The Epworth League*, 33.

The guiding document reveals a keen awareness on Robinson's part of late adolescent behaviors at the time and adults' Christian responsibility to assist adolescents in navigating the countercurrents of this developmental period. Robinson writes, "There is an age between parental control and the later influence of a wife or husband that is flippantly denominated 'the wild oats period.' It is a most dangerous age. It is an interregnum of social anarchy. To bridge this age chasm safely is a most sacred obligation of the fathers, to the end that the children may walk in it safely."[20] Mentoring late adolescents as workers for Christ and Christ's Church was the discipleship method of the Epworth League, one of Methodism's first attempts at nurturing adolescents for lifelong discipleship. A century later, United Methodist churches would do well to follow those portions of the Epworth League's approach which accepted responsibility for discipling youth for the long term. St. Paul is one such community of faith.

St. Paul United Methodist Church

St. Paul has long had an active and vibrant youth ministry. However, in order to move toward a more fully adoptive approach to youth ministry to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship, it is necessary to take a closer look at the human factors which contribute to the make-up of the St. Paul family. Doing so will provide an opportunity to examine and critique how St. Paul currently facilitates ministry to, with, for, and through youth.

St. Paul is located in Lusby, Maryland. Setting in southern Calvert County along the western short of the Chesapeake Bay, the church campus is approximately sixty miles

[20] Robinson, *The Epworth League*, 14.

southwest of Washington, D. C. Lusby would be considered "exurbia"[21] in relation to the nation's capital.

Calvert County residents are, on average, very affluent. "Calvert ranks as 13th richest (county) in the nation" was a recent local newspaper headline. The average median income is $88,862.00.[22] Many of St. Paul's congregants are financially blessed through being employed by the federal government or through working for any of several relatively high-paying local employers. Some congregants teach in the local school system, which offers a pay scale that allows families to thrive financially.

However, living costs in the region are expensive and challenging for single-income families. In her 2012 article for *The Calvert Recorder*, Melissa Major writes, "Calvert County falls within the second-most-expensive group of counties in Maryland for families, according to the (state of Maryland) self-sufficiency standard. A family composed of one adult and one preschooler in Calvert County needs $53,735 a year for basic costs."[23] While there are many affluent families attending St. Paul, other congregants are part of the demographic whose income falls below the self-sufficiency standard for Maryland in the year 2012. Members of the youth ministry team at St. Paul

[21] "Exurbia" is "the region outside the suburbs of a city, consisting of residential areas (exurbs) that are occupied predominantly by rich commuters (exurbanites)." *The Free Dictionary*, s. v. "exurbia," http://www.thefreedictionary.com/exurbia (accessed March 27, 2012). This definition, which includes the reference to "rich commuters," was chosen because while "rich" is a relative term, many of those who attend St. Paul are affluent.

[22] Jeff Newman, "Region Tops Wealth Charts," *The Calvert Recorder*, February 17, 2012.

[23] Melissa Major, "Costs Go Up, Salaries Go Down," *The Calvert Recorder*, February 29, 2012. A chart in the same article showed $29.70 as the "hourly self-sufficiency wage" for the same demographic to cover basic needs of housing, food, transportation, and child care without government assistance. Major cites the following as a primary source for this information: Self Sufficiency Standard.org, "Maryland 2012," http://www.selfsufficiencystandard.org/docs/Maryland2012.pdf (accessed March 27, 2012).

also fall into both the affluent category and the non-affluent category. These socioeconomic facts will affect assessing and implementing the adaptive changes needed for St. Paul to embrace a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry.

St. Paul has an established history of ministry to children and youth. The church's website records the history of the church, and reports the following:

> During the 1980's, the church continued to grow rapidly with the addition of more adult and children's Sunday School classes, a second worship service, the SPUMPS preschool program and the revitalization of the United Methodist Youth Fellowship. Growth continued and in 1993, the Christian Life Center (CLC), complete with an Activity Center which houses a middle school-size gymnasium, stage, and kitchen sufficient for feeding large groups, meeting rooms, an office suite, library, and more classrooms, was consecrated. With the need for additional education space, four new classrooms were built onto the Christian Life Center in 2002.[24]

The physical plant where St. Paul gathers for worship and performs many of its ministries is sufficient for the worshipping population of about two hundred persons. The campus is known for its high visibility from both geographical and ministerial standpoints. Located on a major community thoroughfare, St. Paul's campus is also within five miles of where the Patuxent River flows into the Chesapeake Bay, making the surrounding area a "waterfront community." The community draws those who can afford water activity both to live permanently and to visit. This portion of the state and county, however, is also home to many homeless and those living at or near the poverty level. Outside of school activity, there is little for adolescents to do. This gives local church youth ministries opportunities in the areas of outreach and discipleship. St. Paul is one of the larger area churches, both in attendance and in physical plant capabilities. A noted

[24] St. Paul United Methodist Church, Lusby, MD, "Our Church's History," St. Paul United Methodist Church, http://www.stpaul-lusby.com/hist.htm (accessed March 27, 2012). It is noteworthy that many of the spaces added in 1993 and all of the spaces added in 2002 were and continue to be dedicated to children's and youth ministry.

strength within the church and by the surrounding community is that there are activities every night of the week and on weekends, with ministries that focus on youth and families being conducted on most evenings.

St. Paul has a notable and established recent history of striving to minister in a more adoptive manner to youth. In the spring of 2006 when the youth pastor discovered that local youth were being arrested for skateboarding in the parking lots of local businesses, the youth pastor obtained permission and recruited assistance from the church members to transform the campus parking lot into a "skate park" one night each week during the summer months. The effort ministered to many community skateboarders and garnered both national and international recognition as an outreach ministry to youth. St. Paul Youth Ministries has facilitated "open gym basketball" during the winter months for twenty years, providing a safe setting in which community youth have been drawn. Each fall, the youth ministry hosts a "Teen Block Party" which has historically drawn between two hundred and four hundred early and midadolescents from the community as well as neighboring counties for an evening of evangelistic outreach, food, and activities at no charge to participants. Weekly youth ministry gatherings draw adolescents from not only the St. Paul congregation, but also unchurched youth and those whose churches provide no youth ministry. Few of these same youth attend weekly worship, many opting instead to attend Sunday school, which runs concurrent with a later worship service.

The youth pastor is the only paid staff within St. Paul Youth Ministries. Therefore the "person power" facet of ministry to, for, with, and through adolescents at St. Paul is supported primarily by volunteers. Several of the youth-focused events hosted by the church require large teams of volunteers in order to function. For instance, the

Annual "Teen Block Party" requires approximately seventy adult volunteers to run safely. While all of this activity is laudable on the part of those acting on behalf of the youth, through post-graduate education and research, the youth pastor has embraced the fact that there is a big difference between committing to one or even many events for youth and embracing a hermeneutic of adoption in order to disciple adolescents for a lifetime. Making the shift to the latter will involve adaptive changes on the part of those who minister to youth at St. Paul.

St. Paul's senior pastor was appointed to the church in 2011.[25] The senior pastor is a second-career minister who answered God's call to full-time vocational ministry after becoming "more and more fulfilled by serving in churches in different capacities as a lay person."[26] The senior pastor is a very intelligent person who is open to new ideas. He is visionary and is supportive of a missional approach to ministry.[27] He is very interested in the youth ministry and the approach and theology of the youth pastor with respect to youth and family ministry. The senior pastor supportively asks questions about a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry and offers his opinions and ideas freely.

The senior pastor is currently leading a vision team comprised of himself, the youth pastor, and several lay persons. The purpose of the team is to establish a new vision for the church based on the intersection of the gifting of the congregation by God's

[25] The UMC employs the "itinerant system" in placing senior pastors. This means the bishop of each geographical conference assigns senior pastors to each parish.

[26] David Graves, introductory sermon (sermon given to St. Paul United Methodist Church, Lusby, MD, July 3, 2011).

[27] A "missional church" is one that understands the Church universal to be both "sent by God and sending on God's behalf" (see John 20:21), the instrument of the gospel of Jesus Christ rather than the goal of the gospel. The *missio Dei* is understood to be not a "programmatic" Church, but the Church defined as God's people sent into the community and world. See Darrell L. Guder, *Missional Church: A Vision for the Sending of the Church in North America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1998), 3-7.

Holy Spirit and the needs of the community for which these gifts best meet. The timing for instituting a hermeneutic of adoption as a way to disciple adolescents over their lifetime seems optimal.

The youth ministry team, comprised of several parents of youth, several young adults, several middle-aged adults, the youth pastor, and the youth pastor's wife, is for the most part committed to the youth and to the ministry. When they are among adolescents in casual settings, nearly all of the youth ministers fully engage with the youth. These youth disciplers exude a caring, nurturing love for youth. During times of deep conversation and teaching, some tend to defer to the youth pastor or other authority figures. Unless they are given specific instructions (or possibly in their minds, "given permission") to do so, they many times refrain from giving input on critical faith issues. However, the youth ministry advisors have been receptive to the youth pastor's messages that a more intense adoptive approach to ministry in order to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship is needed. Several members of the youth ministry team attend local school and community activities in which adolescents other than their own biological children and their friends participate.

The adult congregants of St. Paul cover the age spectrum, from emerging adults to those in the most latter stage of life. They have been described in the past by the youth pastor as a "teen-crazy" church because of their support of youth activities and events, many times volunteering to provide physical support in a working capacity. Many of these same adults and others in the congregation have financially supported St. Paul Youth Ministries. Others have proved themselves dependable to be called on for special youth events. A much more modest percentage actually interacts with adolescents

personally. A few adults who are parents to pre-teenagers and adolescents take seriously their role of caring for and discipling children other than their own. These modest few, however, model a hermeneutic of adoption toward children and youth that engages these adolescents intensely and intimately and readies them for nurture toward lifelong discipleship.

St. Paul parents are busy people. Many commute to Washington, D. C. or battle traffic semi-locally to get to their places of employment. This fact makes their work days long. Some seem involved and interested in their children's spiritual lives, while some are aloof, seemingly believing that discipling their children is "the Church's job." This is evidenced by the absence of some adults from church community life, and by others who are only marginally involved. A modest percentage of St. Paul adults (other than youth ministry team ministers) invest in the lives of adolescents other than their own.

St. Paul's youth pastor has been ministering to youth within the church and in the larger community for twenty-five years. Fourteen years ago, the youth pastor left an industry job to take over the then newly created full-time youth pastor position. He and his wife later took a needy and troubled teenager from the local community into their home for several years until the youth entered college. The youth pastor has credibility with most in the congregation, many who know first-hand of his work, often with their own children and adolescents. Students who know the youth pastor readily approach him on their school campuses and in the community with their friends in tow, revealing a seeming affinity for him. The local school system has invited the youth pastor to meetings to discuss adolescent behaviors and issues and to address the student and staff population in the aftermath of student deaths. Several young adults who were discipled

by St. Paul Youth Ministries are now vocational pastors, seminary students, and active lay persons in churches where they have settled and are raising families. Other young adults who have remained at St. Paul serve as youth ministers in St. Paul Youth Ministries at present. Several years ago when the associate pastor at St. Paul was not replaced, the youth pastor began to be utilized in "associate pastor" roles, a practice which has continued. As such, the youth pastor is given the opportunity to address the congregation typically in "preaching roles," where he has for the past several years introduced the congregation to a hermeneutic of adoptive youth ministry in order to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. The youth pastor has actively enlisted an intergenerational contingent of congregants to invest more intensely in the lives of St. Paul's adolescents through several arms of the youth ministry. The youth pastor was ordained in 2012 and is working on a Doctor of Ministry degree in "youth, family, and culture."

St. Paul exhibits gifts for ministry to youth that will nurture them toward lifelong discipleship and some shortcomings as well. Many in the congregation are receptive to the message of needed adaptive change in this area. A critical question for any church is, "Are we becoming involved in what God is doing in our midst or are we 'trying to create our own current' with respect to God's plan for us?" A church should strive to be a current which helps guide and nurture adolescents in the journey to individuation toward lifelong discipleship. A hermeneutic of adoption that nurtures adolescents toward lifelong discipleship corresponds to the biblical witness to God's deliverance of and care for his people.

PART TWO

THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION

CHAPTER 3

BIBLICAL BASIS FOR HERMENEUTIC OF ADOPTION FOR YOUTH MINISTRY

> I will establish my covenant as an everlasting covenant between me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you. The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.
>
> —Genesis 17:6-8

> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last.
>
> —John 15:16

> For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.
>
> —1 Corinthians 12:13

> For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love.
>
> —Galatians 5: 5-6

Clearly there are many challenges to the adolescent journeying through the psychosocial developmental process of individuation. Adolescents navigating the currents of the adolescent journey are asking the huge life questions: "Who am I?" "Do I matter?" "Where do I belong?" "What can I contribute?" These questions are being asked in an atmosphere of mistrust which has been propagated by a culture of

abandonment created by adults who should have the best interests of adolescents in mind.

Based on their research, Smith and Denton believe that even though many American adolescents are structurally disconnected from the world of adults who should be caring for them, many of these youth still seek God and trustworthy adults to provide spiritual direction.[1] Their research also indicates that the faith lives of nearly 75 percent of religious teenagers mimic their parents' faith.[2] This information can be interpreted as good news for a church willing to embrace a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry and be an assertive presence in assisting the faith journeys of families and their adolescent children.

The biblical witness shows God adopting humankind for his own throughout history. Through God's self-initiated covenant with Abram in Genesis 17, God promises to create for himself a great nation, Israel, promising also to provide for and protect them as his family. In John 15:16, Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." Through Jesus Christ and according to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:13, all of humankind are baptized into Christ's body, the Church, as if being "adopted" into God's family by the Holy Spirit. God therefore has provided the Church with a fitting "hermeneutic of adoption" on which to base an approach to youth ministry that can counter the current of contemporary culture's abandoning of adolescents by its adult population.

[1] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 186, 243.

[2] Ibid., 34.

Genesis 17:6-8

From the earliest biblical accounts of God communicating with humankind, God covenants with his creation in language that claims humankind as God's own. In God's second divine speech of Genesis 17, God speaks to Abraham, announcing that God is establishing an eternal covenant with Abraham and his descendants, "in order to be your God and your descendants' God."[3] The establishment of this covenant is in the form of a grace-filled adoption in which God acts in grace toward humankind for all eternity. Abraham and his descendants need only respond in faith to this act of unmerited favor by receiving the gift of grace[4] contained in God's promise that he will be their God. Genesis commentator G. J. Wenham refers to this as "the ultimate covenant blessing" and "greatest of divine blessings."[5] Wenham proposes that God's phrasing "expresses the heart of the covenant, that God has chosen Abraham and his descendants, so that they are in a unique relationship: he is their God, and they are his people."[6]

Brevard Childs relates that from the exclamation, "Adam where art thou?" God revealed himself to be the initiator in his relationship with humankind.[7] The biblical witness discloses that this self-revelation to and pursuit of humankind on God's part is

[3] G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, vol. 2 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1994), 17, Logos Bible Software 5.

[4] Some might argue that the covenant was based on the conditions that the people "walk blamelessly" and be circumcised. Though God does instruct these things, K. A. Mathews views the covenant as a spiritual one based on God's grace, which cannot be broken by the peoples' human failures. See K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, vol. 1B of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2005), 195-196, Logos Bible Software 5.

[5] Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 21-22. God repeatedly claims and reclaims Israel and promises to be Israel's God throughout Scripture. See Exodus 6:7, Leviticus 26:12, and Ezekiel 36:28 for examples.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 43-46.

not due to any shortcoming, but to a merciful and gracious intent on God's part to reveal God's faithfulness to those God adopts.[8] God acts based on his wish to reveal his faithfulness because he loves and wishes to be in relationship with his creation. Scripture states, "It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the LORD set his heart on you and chose you—for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the LORD loved you" (Deuteronomy 7:7-8). Childs believes that "having life" occurs when God's people come to know God through faith by the means of God's self-revelation, the result being that humankind will then trust God, which brings about "righteousness" sustained by God's divine promise contained in God's covenantal love.[9]

Walter Brueggemann indicates that the strength and intensity of God's love and God's yearning for that which is best for his creation is reflected in God's covenantal relationship with the people.[10] This covenantal love is what transforms them personally on an individual level and corporately into the nation which God claims. Brueggemann offers direct and meaningful correlation between God creating a nation to "adopt" and a hermeneutic of adoption for today's church that is looking to minister to the psychosocial needs of adolescents. He states, "As the tradition now stands, the covenant is the primary

[8] The biblical witness identifies the importance of faithfulness as a critical component of God's character and love. Psalm 89 provides a direct example of God defining his love in terms of God's faithfulness to his covenant with Israel through David. See Psalm 89:28-37.

[9] Childs, *Old Testament Theology,* 92-103. Childs presents Habakkuk as an example of one who realized "salvation" as trusting God for righteousness. When the prophet questioned God as to why "the righteous" suffered, God's response was to "live in God's presence and to await the beginning of God's rule," even while those who remained faithful to God remained under tyrannical rule. Habakkuk obeys and then is able to testify that he can yet rejoice and trust in the Lord. See Habakkuk 1-3. The Apostle Paul will provide similar guidance for God's faithful with respect to waiting for God's righteousness in Galatians 5:5.

[10] Walter Brueggemann, "Genesis," in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Preaching and Teaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 154.

metaphor for understanding Israel's life with to God. It is the covenant which offers to Israel the gift of hope, the reality of identity, the possibility of belonging, the certitude of vocation."[11]

Adoptive love that results in a promise (covenant) is powerfully enticing in beginning and building relationships between God and people and between people and people. Adoptive love brings a "change in status" in the one to whom the love is shown. Genesis commentator K. Strassner asserts that due to God's covenant with Abram and Sarai, the two had undergone a transformative change in status, from father of no one to father of God's chosen people, from barren to blessed. In their culture, such a massive transformational change was so significant that it was demarcated by a name change for the recipients.[12]

In his book, *Covenant and Creation*, William J. Dumbrell explains that God is revealed in Genesis 17 as *El Shaddai*. This name for God appearing at this time is significant because from this point on *El Shaddai* as a name for God is used to recognize and remember God's powerful intervention into Abraham's life and that of Israel.[13] Abram is transformed and Israel is "created" as a nation of God's chosen people, due to God's direct intervention into the individual and collective lives of Abram and Israel, respectively.

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[11] Brueggemann, "Genesis," 154.

[12] K. Strassner, *Opening Up Genesis* in *Opening Up the Bible Commentary* (Leominster, UK: Day One Publications, 2009), Logos Bible Software 5.

[13] William J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster Press, 1984), 73.

In his book, *Patriarchs*, E. Bridge contends that God's adoptive love for Israel revealed by the Abrahamic covenant also involved divine mercy. Scripture brings to light the fact that the Abrahamic covenant is invoked by God in numerous occurrences that reveal God's grace and mercy to Israel regardless of their "failed performance" in faithfulness or obedience. The covenant is credited in Deuteronomy 13:17 and in 2 Kings 13:23 to explain why God does not destroy the Israelites when they sin. In Leviticus 26:42, Deuteronomy 4:31, Isaiah 45:4, and Micah 7:19-20, the covenant is invoked to explain why God returns the nation from exile. In Luke 1:55, the covenant is referenced to explain God's constant care and concern of Israel regardless of the Israelites' "performance."[14]

Genesis reveals that God's adoptive love and plan for humankind is so irrevocable that God seals it with a covenant between himself and Abraham. God's adoptive love, plan, and promise were transformative for Abraham and Sarah and set the path for the nation of Israel. God looked upon Abram in love, knowing Abram would be transformed by that love. God met Abram where Abram was and led him to a new place. God revealed his irrevocable love to both Abram and the nation of Israel. No matter how either Abram or the nation of Israel "performed" under the covenant, time and again, rather than abandon them, God remained faithful to care for Abram and the people.

When a church follows God's model of covenant, adoptive, irrevocable love toward Abraham and applies that model to youth ministry, then those adolescents who are attempting to determine who they are, if they matter, and where they belong, and who

[14] E. Bridge, *Patriarchs* in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary,* ed. J. D. Barry and L. Wentz (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software 5, 2012).

feel abandoned by those who should be their caretakers, may look to such a church for guidance and care. In her book, *The Adolescent Journey*, Amy Jacober states, "The identification of adolescents as feeling first lost and then the almost palpable feeling of being abandoned drives them into a frenetic push for affirmation, loyalty and solid relationships."[15] If this is true, an affirming church that would loyally follow the model of God's covenantal love toward adolescents and offer solid adult-to-youth relationships would be a "promised land" to abandoned adolescents.

Abraham trusted God and was credited by God with righteousness. God led Abraham to the place which God had prepared. An adoptive church could be used by God to do the same for abandoned adolescents today.

John 15:16

Jesus' statement to his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last" in John 15:16 directly answers the psychosocial needs of abandoned adolescents on a spiritual level. This truth can be echoed by the Church to remind abandoned adolescents who they are, that they do matter, and to assure them of where they belong. Jesus tells those who would trust in him, "I chose you!" The adolescent searching for her or his identity asks on a psychosocial level, "Who am I?" The Church can respond, "You are a child of the king of the universe, the one upon who even time is measured. The adolescent seeking autonomy asks, "Do I matter?" The Church can answer, "Yes, the Lord of Lords and

[15] Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey*, 88.

King of Kings, he through, in, and for whom everything was created,[16] chooses you specifically to 'bear fruit' for his kingdom purposes." The late adolescent seeking for belonging and reconnection to a community that he or she can call "home" is asking, "Where do I belong?" The Church can and should answer, "You belong with us as we also trust Jesus to help us love each other through the power of God's Holy Spirit, and as we wait on the hope of righteousness."

Jesus' claim on his followers in John 15 is from the heart of grace. Jesus' language reminds readers that God knows each person and that God is the initiator, inviting persons to be part of the kingdom. K. O. Gangel, a commentator on the Gospel of John, writes, "We don't find God. God finds us."[17] Because God makes this invitation, God knows his people. If God knows his people, the psychosocial question of value that lies within the adolescent question, "Who am I?" is settled. Each person is a person of value, created and known by God.

However, even though the disciples were, as are all persons, of infinite value as created persons of God, they did nothing to deserve the call of the God's son to be part of his work. Therefore "performance" on the disciples' part was not involved in their invitation to follow Jesus. The privilege of trusting and following was bestowed due to grace.[18] Though the biblical witness reveals that the disciples did not yet realize exactly who was inviting them to be part of his work to change the world, by the time of this

[16] See John 1:3, Romans 11:36, and Colossians 1:16.

[17] K. O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 286, Logos Bible Software 5.

[18] G. R. Beasley-Murray, *John*, vol. 36 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 2002), 275, Logos Bible Software 5.

particular declaration of Jesus on the night before he would be crucified, the disciples would have known they had been invited into a ministry of significant meaning to many by an intensely compassionate miracle worker. Just prior, Jesus had ensured the disciples that they had been elevated above the role of "servant" to that of friend. Psychosocially, at the point of their invitation to Jesus' work, the mere fact that a rabbi in their culture had extended such an invitation would have shown that Jesus considered the disciples to be persons of value. Elevating them to the status of friends bestowed even greater value upon them.[19] God knew the disciples and Jesus "chose" them. These men mattered to Jesus, not because of anything they had done, but just because God created and knew them.

Returning to the call of Abraham, another commentator on the Gospel of John, G. L. Borchert, interprets Jesus' declaration that he "chose" the disciples, saying it contains the direct link between "election" by God and "purpose" for those chosen. Borchert writes, "It is absolutely crucial whenever one discusses the subject of election to realize that election is not about privilege but purpose. As early as the summons of Abram to leave his home and receive the blessing of God, to receive a new name and become a great nation, that blessing was accompanied by a divine purpose—to be a blessing to all the people of the earth."[20]

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[19] R. Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and D. Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), Logos Bible Software 5.

[20] G. L. Borchert provides other examples of this link citing the promise of Jesus' presence with the commission to disciple the world at the end of Matthew and the imparting of the Holy Spirit when purposing the disciples with the forgiveness of sins in John 20: 20-23. See G. L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2002), 150-151, Logos Bible Software 5.

Jesus continues with language that validates Borchert's argument and endures to answer the psychosocially important question asked by adolescents: "Do I matter?" After reminding the disciples that he chose them, Jesus continues by explaining why he chose them, telling them they have been "set aside" for the purpose of "going forth and yielding fruit."

G. L. Beasley-Murray, another John commentator, asserts that election in the Bible is always for a purpose. Jesus' use of verb tense in this passage bears out this assertion. In verse 16, Jesus uses the same verb ("ἔθηκα" meaning "set aside") when he tells the disciples that they are to "go forth and bear fruit" that he uses immediately prior in verse 13 as Jesus tells the disciples he was "setting aside" his own life for others. The phrasing Jesus uses to deliver this message to the disciples indicates to them that not only did God create the disciples with a high purpose, but Jesus was describing their purpose in the manner that he described God's intention for himself. Both Jesus' and the disciples' purposes were ordained by God. The disciples are to "go forth and bear fruit." "Bearing fruit" here is taken to mean garnering more disciples as a result of being sent on mission by Jesus.[21] Both Jesus and the disciples are set aside in order that others may gain access to God.

[21] This term appears in other passages for those God purposes. Beasley-Murray provides these additional examples: Numbers 8:10 for the ordination of Levites, Numbers 27:18 as Moses sets aside Joshua to take leadership of Israel, Acts 13:47 in the setting aside of the Servant of the Lord for his ministry as light and salvation of the nations, and in 1 Timothy 1:12 for Paul's being set aside for the apostolic ministry. See Beasley-Murray, *John*, 275.

Though some may argue that Jesus' words in John 15 apply uniquely to his disciples,[22] Peter paralleled a theme of adoption for all in reminding the Jews that while they had once not been a people, God claimed them as his people. In 1 Peter 2, Peter refers to them as a "royal priesthood" who were to "offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." J. R. Michaels proclaims that the language Peter uses reveals that his message is indeed not given only to the Jewish audience, but the Christian community at large.[23] This is good news for adolescents in the midst of psychosocial development that causes them to ask, "Where do I belong?" It also provides hope that there is a community of love and support available to adolescents stinging from the abandonment of adults who they once trusted to care. To these youth the church can say, "God's adoption is for all those who will trust Jesus. You are God's children. The fact that you matter is confirmed in evidence such as Jesus choosing you and the honorific titles God grants to you like those Peter proclaims to the early Christian community. Where do you belong? Among the 'royal priesthood' of all called to trust Jesus to understand your identity, worth, and place and as we wait, with the help of God's Holy Spirit, upon the hope of Christ's righteousness to come to us." This is life with purpose.

As his last act on earth, Jesus commissioned his disciples to establish his Church by making disciples of all people, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the

[22] J. P. Lange and P. Schaff comment on this precept: "The election of Christ is not identical with the election to the kingdom on the part of God, in the Pauline sense (Augustine and others), though, in respect to these faithful disciples, the former election is pre-suppositive of the latter; the choosing spoken of by Christ is the election to the apostolic office. [However], in a more general sense it is here expressive of Christ's election of any and all of His disciples to render friendly service to Him as co-workers in His kingdom of love (Euth. Zig., Luthardt)." See J. P. Lange and P. Schaff, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: John* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2008), 467.

[23] J. R. Michaels, *1 Peter*, vol. 49 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 108, Logos Bible Software 5.

Son, and of the Holy Spirit. God works in baptism to claim those offering themselves to the sacrament, solidifying their new birth, identity, and purpose as disciples of Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.[24] While "new birth" in the Christian sense indicates a spiritual awakening to the need for God's grace in one's life, the term also very significantly points to "family," for one is born into family. John 3: 3-8 provides the language of "new birth." Being saved means one becomes a "child of God" by way of being "adopted" into the family of God. Adoption is a lifetime of commitment, an ongoing process. Likewise, the Wesleyan concept of salvation is also a lifetime of commitment and an ongoing process as God's Holy Spirit dwells within persons in order to bring those children of God to righteousness in order to reflect Gods' glory in the world.

When a family adopts a child, the act of adoption and claiming is due not because of anything the child has done, but because of the parents' love. Similarly, God's grace in a person's "new birth" is present not because the child deserves such an act, but because of God's limitless grace, passion and mercy toward God's children. When a person by God's grace and calling is "born again" or "born from above," that person embarks on a new form of life, like Abraham being incorporated into the family and sent by God. In baptism, those accepting God's "adoption" become children of God, brothers

[24] Wesleyan theology asserts that God is always the initiator in acts of grace, and that though persons offer themselves for the sacrament of baptism, God, through grace, is the acting agent. Because God makes the claim on the person, that claim and therefore the person's new identity and God's purpose for the person to be united with Christ for furthering God's Kingdom is set. While acts of persons can fail, the acts of an all-powerful God cannot. Therefore the person is "claimed and purposed" for all eternity. See L. H. Stookey, *Baptism: Christ's Act in the Church* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1982), 13-28. See also World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper No. 111* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2004), 2.

and sisters of Christ, and a "temple of the Holy Spirit" whom God accepts, claims, loves and purposes.[25]

1 Corinthians 12:13

Paul continues this theme of intense, intimate, lifelong claim and purpose of God upon one's life in 1 Corinthians 12:13. According to Paul, all of humankind are baptized into Christ's body, the Church, as if being "adopted" into God's family by the Holy Spirit. In fact, Paul uses language that goes beyond even adoption into a family to that of becoming part of a body unified with Christ by God's Holy Spirit.[26] Again, God's grace is inherent and God is the acting agent as God sets aside heritage, ethnicity, class, and status to claim and purpose each person into Kingdom living.[27] Each person who accepts God's claim upon her or his life assumes a particular identity, significance, and purpose in the family and kingdom of God. Corinthians commentator K. Schenck writes, "God's grace and the giftedness that comes from the Spirit apply to all his people, not just a few who stand out. God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be (1 Corinthians 12:17–18). God's policy is thus, 'no part left behind.'

[25] My gratitude to Dr. Kendall Soulen, Systematic Theology Professor at Wesley Theological Seminary, for his insights on "new birth" in relation to John's gospel and his views regarding adoption into the family of God related to God's calling to and covenant with Abraham in Genesis.

[26] In Romans 11 Paul also speaks in terms of those outside the Jewish faith being "grafted into" a cultivated olive tree, the analogy to the Jewish nation. See Romans 11: 17-24. J. Calvin and J. Pringle declare that the purpose of "baptism by the Spirit" in verse 13 is to "engraft" the believer into Christ's body." See J. Calvin and J. Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, Vol. 1 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 406.

[27] R. L. Pratt, Jr., *I & II Corinthians*, vol. 7 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 217, Logos Bible Software 5.

Everyone counts in the body of Christ, and God has a role for every part to play."[28] With this teaching, Paul makes a case for the biblical witness supporting the concept that God's Word, and therefore the Church, has an affirmative answer to the questions of the adolescent journey to individuation, "Who am I, do I matter, and where do I belong?"

In fact, Paul's teaching here can be used to let the questioning adolescent know that she or he not only matters and belongs, but is crucial to God's purposes, both as an individual and as part of the Church. Paul teaches that God has assembled the human body in a particular fashion, creating it from parts according to his divine wisdom and so that each part can and will fulfill a specifically designed purpose. Paul continues in the thought that if it were not for each individually created and purposed part of the body, there would be no body. Paul emphasizes that every part of the body is needed.[29] This is life with meaning and purpose.

Schenk points out that not only the existence of the body is at stake, but the quality of life for all persons is dependent on each part of the body. Schenk's interpretation speaks to how persons connected to and by Christ share aspects and qualities of life which implies belonging. He writes, "The success of other Christians is your success, because they are you—you are both part of the same body. Similarly, their pain is also your pain, because you are both the same body."[30]

R. L. Pratt, Jr., another Corinthians commentator, speaks to the identity-seeking adolescent who may struggle with the concepts of "unity" versus "uniformity."

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[28] K. Schenck, *1 & 2 Corinthians: A Commentary for Bible Students* (Indianapolis: Wesleyan Publishing House, 2006), 177-178, Logos Bible Software 5.

[29] Pratt, *I & II Corinthians*, 219.

[30] See Schenck, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 179.

Adolescents asking the question "Who am I?" are looking for how they as individuals can contribute with the gifts they have to offer. While Paul argues from the standpoint that "unity" within the Church is to be assumed as part of the Church's identity, diversity of each person's identity is welcomed and celebrated. People are not all the same, nor are they meant to be. Daniel L. Migliore, in his book, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, writes, "Personhood is profoundly relational and difference enriches rather than subverts equality."[31] Paul's message in the verses 14-24 argues that in order for the Church to function at its best, the Spirit gifts persons diversely and guides them to use their gifts in diverse ways. This means that diversity that reveals itself in differing gifts between persons should not be considered an issue that divides. Rather, the diversity of gifts manifested in each person reveal the creativity of God's Holy Spirit to create a magnificent body as God works his plan in and through each person.[32]

The juxtaposition of differing gifts as an expression of individuality while being enmeshed in a Christian community is critical for the spiritually developing adolescent. However, this concept can present a challenge for those who disciple youth. A maturing adolescent Christian may struggle psychosocially with the concept of being an integral part of the body of Christ, seeing such a current as seemingly counter to his or her individuation. Jacober informs, "Adolescence brings the first potential for cognitive

[31] Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 268.

[32] Pratt, *I & II Corinthians*, 218.

comprehension that there is the possibility for the negation of self. This is a large part of what makes adolescence such a crucial time in the spiritual life of an individual."[33]

With respect to belonging to the body of Christ, commentators K. L. Chafin and L. J. Ogilvie contend that

> the more mature we become in Christ, the more we realize that throughout our entire life we will continue to need each other. We complement each other, challenge each other, comfort each other, and communicate with each other. Within this context we find our Christian identity, our ministry to one another, our growth, and our support. The church is the place where each of us is needed and each of us brings needs. This is what we all have in common and it gives us a basis for unity.[34]

All three psychosocial needs of identity, autonomy, and belonging and how they can be answered on a spiritual level are addressed in Chafin and Ogilvie's statement. In response to "Who am I?" they would respond, "I am created to trust in Jesus Christ as I live in community with others who do the same." In response to "Do I matter?" they would answer, "Yes, because I am to learn, grow and minister to others." In response to "Where do I belong?" they would say, "Within the community of faith so I can support others as I wait on God's Holy Spirit to bring me to the righteous state in which God created me to exist."

Galatians 5

A question the Church can expect from adolescents abandoned by both individuals and corporate entities that were previously trusted might be, "How strong is this community of faith called 'the church' and my 'belonging' within it?" According to

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[33] Jacober, *The Adolescent Journey*, 152.

[34] K. L. Chafin and L. J. Ogilvie, *1, 2 Corinthians,* vol. 30 of *The Preacher's Commentary Series* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1985), 153, Logos Bible Software 5.

Paul's teaching, the bond between the Christian and Christ is external and visible. God's grace precedes one's acceptance of Christ whose love is so perfect and all-powerful that once one trusts Jesus, "fruit of the spirit" become visible. The bond is also internal and spiritual. Commentator C. Simeon writes, "Christianity brings men not only into one body, but into a oneness of heart and affection; insomuch that, in their collective capacity, they bear the sacred name of 'Christ,' as the members of the human body do of the individual to whom they belong."[35] Another Corinthians commentator, D. Prime, continues with a description of the strength of this bond: "Members of the body cannot opt out of the body. God's involvement in the arrangement of the contributions of the various parts of the body underlines this. We need one another, and God wants it so."[36]

Too often, however, contemporary adolescents have received a message counter to the fact that they are wanted, needed, and that God wants it so. Many adolescents have come to believe that they are accepted based only on what they have to offer, if they do what is expected, if their "performance" is deemed "worthy."[37] An exegesis of Galatians 5 provides a theology of one's identity based on one's relationship with the Creator God

[35] C. Simeon, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, vol. 16 of *Horae Homileticae* (London: Holdsworth and Ball, 1833), 307, Logos Bible Software 5.

[36] D. Prime, *Opening Up 1 Corinthians: Opening Up Commentary* (Leominister, UK: Day One Publications, 2005), 112, Logos Bible Software 5.

[37] See Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, especially Chapters 5 and 7, which cover school and sports, two areas where adolescents feel particular pressure to perform. See also Pope, *Doing School*, 1-49 and Elkind, *The Hurried Child*, 57-59.

that counters the current of person's worth based on "performance" under which contemporary adolescents struggle.[38]

Paul begins in Galatians 5 by reminding the Church there that Christ has set them free for freedom's sake. They are not to be hampered by burdens God does not intend them to carry. In verse one Paul states, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery." Paul not only encourages the hearers to accept the freedom Christ offers, but he also exhorts them to ignore messages from those who would rob them of their freedom. Paul's message is made more compelling by the spirit in which he speaks. His language reveals a parental concern for the Galatians that could be interpreted as defending them rhetorically from the threat at hand.[39] Paul's manner, beginning in verse one and continuing through verse twelve, models an adoptive, protective attitude toward those under his care. The church that embraces Paul's attitude expressed here could well bring a message of hope to abandoned adolescents in need of such acceptance and love.

Paul's words in Galatians 5:1 could also help adolescents navigating the adolescent journey to find their identity in Christ. As Paul does repeatedly, he first makes a declaration in indicative form, that what Christ did in setting us free, Christ did for all time. Paul follows this with a command in the imperative form: "Stand firm." Galatians commentator T. George interprets it this way: "Because of who God is and

[38] Gratitude to Dr. Chap Clark who revealed the link to and applicability of Galatians 5 with respect to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry in nurturing adolescents for lifelong discipleship. Clark, "Strategic Adoption."

[39] R. N. Longenecker, *Galatians,* vol. 41 of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Inc., 1998), 222-225, Logos Bible Software 5.

what he has done for believers in Jesus Christ, Christians are commanded to 'become what they are.'"[40] The Church can say to the adolescent seeking identity, "You are a child of God created for the freedom Jesus provides. Stand firm in that freedom as you embrace your identity in Christ."

Paul alleviates the Galatians from any performance-based idea of worth in verses five and six. His message in this particular part of the passage should resonate with contemporary adolescents who struggle under the notion that they are only accepted based on how well they perform for the adults in their lives. Paul writes, "For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which we hope. For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

Paul credits the work of God's Holy Spirit to transform the lives of Galatians throughout his letter to them.[41] Paul had previously pointed out to his Galatian charges that they had failed when they tried to accomplish works based on what they believed the law required rather than trusting God's Spirit. Paul words in the first six verses of Galatians 3 remind the Galatians that Abraham was credited with righteousness, not by his works or by following the law closely, but because Abraham "believed God."

Adolescents who have lived under a performance-based value system, where they feel as though they are only as good as their performance, may not understand that belief in Jesus alone could count for anything. However, Jesus' own words put belief in the context of "doing something." John 6: 28-29 reveals that Jesus was asked, "What must

[40] T. George, *Galatians*, vol. 30 of *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 352, Logos Bible Software 5.

[41] Ibid., 360.

we do to do the works God requires?" He answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent." Jesus defined the "work" of the believer as "believing in Jesus."

The Church then is presented with the challenge of how to define and promote the work of a Christian as "believing in Jesus." Adolescents need to be shown how believing in Jesus manifests as faithful action. This issue leads the Church to relate how faith, trust, and Christian action are linked while faith is not based on performance.

The Greek word used by Paul in this passage is *pisteuo*.[42] This term stands in contrast to *pistis*, also a word linked to faith, but which means "firm persuasion," is based on hearing, and can apply to having faith in a person.[43] *Pisteuo*, however, carries a much stronger meaning of "faith." In his Bible dictionary, W. E. Vine states that *pisteuo* implies faith that involves "a firm conviction, producing a full acknowledgement of God's revelation or truth, a personal surrender to him and a conduct inspired by such surrender."[44] The same word is used for "trust" where a person is willing to act in ways that shows reveals such trust.[45] The Holy Spirit's gift of faith then is internal to a person, unseen to all except God but that manifests in actions of trust which can be seen. Persons can know God is transforming them through faith when they find themselves acting from a base of trust in Jesus. Adolescents inculcated in a culture of value which is based on

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[42] Timothy and Barbara Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament*, Vol. 2 (Victoria, British Columbia: Trafford Publishing, 2006), 584.

[43] W. E. Vine, *Vine's Concise Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishing, 1997), 129.

[44] Ibid.

[45] Vine also contends that *pisteuo* is used as "to commit to one's trust" where God is the one trusting those God chooses. In such examples, God is the one who is acting from trust. See Vine, *Concise Dictionary of the Bible*, 391. An example of a person showing such trust is found in Luke 16:11. An example where God is the trusting one is found in 1 Timothy 1:11.

performance should find relief in the knowledge that they need not force faith or actions based on faith. Galatians tells them they need only wait in faith for God's Holy Spirit to bring them to a righteous state given to those who trust Jesus. The pressure is off.

Paul continues arguing in verse six that the definition of Christianity is having such faith in God's grace that actions of love result. This implies that all one must do is believe in Jesus enough to open oneself to God's Holy Spirit and let God do the transforming work within one's spirit. There is no performance aspect of this faith for the adolescent. Paul uses the example at hand in his context as he explains this to the church at Galatia in verse six: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

George concludes his commentary with a compelling summary statement of Galatians 5:5-6. If there is any lingering doubt on the mind of adolescents that they must perform to a certain level in order to gain God's grace or attain righteousness, George's summary should reassure them that God does not judge them on the standard of performance as do many within contemporary Western culture. He writes, "Within the space of two verses Paul brought together the basic triad of Christian virtues—faith, hope, and love. None of these are self-generating qualities or mere human possibilities. They are gifts of God actualized in the lives of his children by the presence of his Spirit in their hearts."[46] Paul instructs that waiting on God's Holy Spirit to bring about righteousness is the only trustful action God expects. God's Holy Spirit will guide the seeking adolescent's heart and footsteps on the adolescent journey of psychosocial and spiritual development.

[46] George, *Galatians*, 362.

In *The Divine Conspiracy*, Dallas Willard proposes that the gospel is often interpreted and applied by Christians in a way that can also be especially problematic for adolescents navigating the currents counter to healthy psychosocial development while they are also developing spiritually. Willard calls this mistaken interpretation of the gospel "sin management."[47] Willard's premise is that Christians today do not consider the part of the journey which is everyday life to be at the heart of the gospel. Christians instead too often center the gospel message on sin, its effects, and how to deal with sin's effects, giving no credit to the transformation of one's life and character as a central part of the gospel.[48] Adolescents may be "pulled under" in the vortex created by such a current counter to the grace and freedom offered by God and described by Paul in his message to the Galatians. Adolescents—struggling to meet the myriad of expectations of who they should be and what they should be accomplishing as they try to discern who they are, if they matter, and where they belong—are further abandoned by those who place a standard of perfection propagated by a "gospel of sin management" upon them.

As a response to this problem, Willard offers a link between the faith and righteousness cited in Galatians 5:6 as he returns to God's crediting of Abraham as being a righteous person.[49] Countering the gospel of sin management and linking Abraham's righteousness with his present experience, Willard informs that payment for sins was not at all involved in Abraham's response to God. Abraham trusted God for things in the present as Abraham knew them. In Genesis 15, God promises Abraham an heir.

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[47] Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 41-50.

[48] Ibid., 41.

[49] Ibid., 47.

Abraham believes God will do it. Abraham's relationship with God, based on trust for everyday guidance and provision, was his righteousness. Later, when God promised to always be Israel's God, Abraham trusted that God would be good on his word. Abraham's actions reveal this trust. His actions were not focused on trying to control a sinful nature or "make up" for any sin in his past. James 2: 21-24 states that Abraham trusted God even with the life of Abraham's son Isaac in the balance. In Romans 3: 21-26, Paul links Abraham's righteousness by faith in God with faith in Christ. Paul informs the Roman church that, as God credited Abraham with righteousness for his faith in God, so also does God justify by his grace those who trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. Faith revealing itself in trust is the only requirement to be justified. "The righteousness of God, that is, acceptance by God, comes by a faith response, not works."[50] This is good news to adolescents who might otherwise continue to struggle under the expectation of performance by a culture that has abandoned them to believe God requires them to struggle for a level of acceptability under their own efforts.

Wenham agrees with Willard that it is Abraham's faith alone that causes God to see him as righteous, and it is this faith that leads to righteous actions. Wenham also interprets that righteous actions, good works, or managing to overcome sin are not part of the equation:

> Normally righteousness is defined in terms of moral conduct, for example, Ezekiel 18:5: "If a man is righteous and does what is lawful and right." There then follows a list of actions prohibited in the Pentateuch which a righteous man refrains from doing (verses 6-9). God himself is frequently called "righteous" (e.g., Deuteronomy 32:4; Ps 7:10-12) and righteousness might well be paraphrased as God-like, or at least God-pleasing, action. This sense of God-approved behavior is apparent in Genesis 18:19; 30:33; 38:26. But here Abram is

[50] Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 169.

> not described as doing righteousness. Rather faith is being counted for righteousness. Normally righteousness results in acquittal by the divine judge. Here faith, the right response to God's revelation, counts instead. As the rest of the story makes plain, this faith leads to righteous action (e.g., 18:19), but only here in the OT is it counted as righteousness."[51]

Adolescents who are developing spiritually may find confusing the concept that they need "do nothing" to be counted righteous by God. A reminder of the final portion of Galatians 5:6 is helpful here: "The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love." The term "expressing" in this passage implies action as one cannot express anything in the absence of action. However, once again, such action is initiated by God in a heart seeking God and God's will for one's life. George writes, "We are justified by grace through faith, a faith that indeed is active in love leading to holiness."[52] One is justified before God and attains righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ. It is Christ's love that spurs the person to action on behalf of God toward God's children. Such action, taken at the prompt of God's Holy Spirit in thankful response to Christ's love, leads to the person to holiness. Neither "level of performance" nor "sin management" matters. Only love for God and others matter. So far as God is concerned, the pressure is off adolescents in regards to their psychosocial and spiritual adolescent journeys. God is the source, initiator, facilitator, and developer of the trust God builds within developing adolescents. As God builds that trust through the righteousness sent by the Holy Spirit, the gift of faith grows in adolescents seeking God's righteousness for their lives.

[51] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 330.

[52] George, *Galatians*, 362.

CHAPTER 4

HISTORY OF APPLICABLE APPROACHES TO YOUTH MINISTRY

The name William Tell is not commonly associated with theology of youth ministry. But the Swiss hero's life and legend, and more exactly, the contemplation of his dedicated and focused personal commitment to his skill in the field of archery, provides an unexpected parallel to prayerful, theologically grounded youth ministry praxis. As the story goes, William Tell refused to acknowledge a ruthless Austrian invader's supremacy. For Tell to save the life of his son as well as his own, the Austrian presented Tell with an alternative to death by shooting an apple from his son's head.[1] The skills Tell needed to save his son's life were precision and accuracy. Precision placed the arrow at the same spot over and over. Accuracy picked the spot the arrow would strike so repeatedly. In order to preserve his son's life while winning his own freedom, Tell needed both.

It is that same precision and accuracy that is needed in youth ministry. However the "target" for the youth minister is much more crucial. The youth minister's "target" is adolescents who are growing as lifelong disciples through a trusting relationship with

[1] Middle Ages.org, "William Tell," http://www.middle-ages.org.uk/william-tell.htm (accessed November 20, 2012).

Jesus Christ.[2] Youth workers must minister to adolescents in ways that help youth have a clear focused understanding of how to hit the "target"—a life of discipleship based on trusting Jesus.

Youth ministers carry the responsibility and blessing to disciple and mentor the young, helping them develop the "precision" and "accuracy" in their flights of faith that allows them to "target" Jesus as their life example. As the archer guides the arrows released toward the target with "precision" and "accuracy," the youth minister exemplifies and teaches trust in Christ in order to guide adolescents in a "kingdom trajectory."[3]

Parents, youth pastors, and all those seriously concerned about adolescents' spiritual development need to consider if they are guiding adolescents into an increasingly trusting relationship with Christ. Reggie Joiner postulated, "Imagine the end . . . Who do I really want them to become?" regarding how he might raise his children to become lifelong Jesus followers. Joiner goes on to describe a time when one of his children was dealing with an intensely difficult circumstance. Though Joiner had read a

[2] Clark defines discipleship as a trusting relationship with Jesus Christ, which waits on Christ to bring one to righteousness and which manifests in actions resulting from that trust as well as from gratitude because that trust is found to be well-placed. See Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith: Everyday Ideas to Build Lasting Faith in Your Kids* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 33-37. Clark also taught extensively on this definition of discipleship during the fall 2011 "Youth, Family and Culture" Doctor of Ministry seminar at Fuller Theological Seminary.

[3] "Kingdom trajectory" is a term meaning alignment with the kingdom of God, where one strives to participate with what God is perceived to be doing in the world and in one's context toward God's eschatological purpose, the coming of God's kingdom fully (some use the phrase, "consummation of God's kingdom"). This is in contrast to thinking that actions humans choose in parallel or addition to God's work in the world are best. A discipleship "kingdom trajectory" is helping adolescents align themselves with the kingdom so that God can bring them to righteousness through God's grace in the action of God's Holy Spirit by their faith in Jesus the Christ. Chap Clark, "Spiritual Development of Adolescents" (lecture, Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, November 8-12, 2010). Dr. Ray S. Anderson presents a parallel theology which he titles, "eschatological preference." See Ray S. Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology: Empowering Ministry with Theological Praxis* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 106-109.

myriad of parenting books, he realized none contained an answer he could provide to his daughter. Joiner relates, "That day in my office, it was as if [God] seemed to say to me, 'Maybe you just need to trust me enough so they can see me.'"[4] As was Joiner's "envisioned end" for his own children, youth who trust that "Jesus always knows and has what is best" is the youth worker's intended end or target.

However, solely and accurately defining a worthy endpoint will not get to that point. Praxis requires precision. For instance, a youth worker can be very precise in "hitting the same spot" while that "spot" might not be the intended target. Youth workers must discern if their ministries assist youth in becoming lifelong disciples who trust Jesus the Christ as Lord or if their ministries lead youth "precisely" along other paths to alternative faith destinations.

Resources designed to assist youth workers in discipling youth abound today in the United States. The approaches and intended results of those resources and the intended results of youth workers are as diverse as the resources themselves. The reasons for those differences are revealed by a review of the history about how the concept of youth set apart for a focused ministry in the United States came to be.[5]

Adolescents are more likely to trust Jesus as their Lord for life when the lives of their discipleship mentors guide them to trust Jesus and not someone or something else.[6]

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[4] Reggie Joiner, *Think Orange: Imagine the Impact When Church and Family Collide…* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2009), 54-56.

[5] Mark Senter, III, *When God Shows Up: A History of Protestant Youth Ministry in America* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).

[6] Smith and Denton provide several indicators of disciplers' influence on the faith journeys of adolescents. Among them are: 1) parents are most influential in the religious lives of teenagers, and the majority of American teenagers share the religious beliefs of their parents; 2) religious role models constructively influence the lives of youth; and 3) the valued relationship with religious role models

Youth workers can be more effective disciplers of adolescents for whom they care by knowing the history of youth ministry. This is because knowing the history of youth ministry can better enable the youth discipler to determine if the bases of their theology and praxis of youth ministry help them to nurture adolescents into a faith journey that follows a kingdom trajectory and into a trusting, lifelong discipleship of Jesus the Christ. Conversely, this knowledge can help them to know whether their ministry is leading adolescents "precisely" along other paths to alternative faith destinations.

History of Youth Ministry Theology and Praxis

Youth ministry, like the term "adolescence," is a recent concept.[7] Although the biblical witness shows that God revealed himself to and called those who were likely in the range of ages that today's society consider adolescence (i.e., Jeremiah, David, Mary the mother of Jesus), there was no effort on the part of the early Church to minister to youth in any segregated fashion. In his book, *When God Shows Up*, Senter explores by

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provides incentive for youth to continue in a shared religious tradition. See Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 68, 242, and 243. Powell and Clark report that indicators of "sticky faith" (faith sustained at least through college years) are adult-youth relationships in the youth's church, between youth and extended adult family, and with non-family member faith mentors. See Powell & Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 93-107. Also see Kara E. Powell and Chap Clark, "The Church Sticking Together," Sticky Faith.org, http://stickyfaith.org/articles/the-church-sticking-together (accessed December 18, 2012). Northpoint Community Church in Georgia has built an entire ministry around adults mentoring youth specifically in regard to the faith journeys of the youth. Reggie Joiner reports that youth who had been mentored during their secondary school years continue to be in relationship with their mentors beyond college graduation. See Joiner, *Think Orange*.

[7] Richard Dunn and Mark Senter report that "youth ministry as such did not come into being until the late eighteenth century." Richard R. Dunn and Mark Senter, III, *Reaching a Generation for Christ* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 107. G. Stanley Hall brought the term *adolescence* fully into the American consciousness. Hall presented his examination of this time period known as "adolescence" from a psychological standpoint in 1904. See G. Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1904).

region how early American culture began to segregate youth from adults through educational systems and a child labor force.[8]

During colonial times, Senter explains, neither the local church nor families envisioned that providing educational opportunities for their young would produce a stage of life referred to as "youth" or "adolescence" in which their children would be segregated from adults culturally as is the case today in America. Prior to the Industrial Revolution, families needed the aid of their children to survive. Due to this fact, children often progressed immediately into adulthood without a life stage between childhood and adulthood. As the American frontier opened, some of the young left their families to pursue a more independent future.[9]

As the nineteenth century progressed, writes Senter, youth also saw a way to profit in urban centers where opportunities for work existed. During this period, business owners saw an opportunity for profit in what came to be recognized as child labor. Child labor laws were enacted to protect the young in such environments as were laws requiring public school attendance. This marked a revolutionary social development because for the first time, children and youth were placed away from their families for something other than work and were placed together with other children and youth for a common purpose. An improved economy of the 1920s made it less necessary for many young people to work to help their families survive, which enabled them to attend public school. Public school attendance increased over the next several decades. The term *teenager*

[8] Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 4-11.

[9] Ibid.

came into being after World War II.[10] By the end of the millennium, there was a youth culture so well defined and acknowledged that academia was offering textbooks to persons working with youth.[11]

As America enters the second decade of the twenty-first century, the world of the American adolescent continues to change rapidly. Marketers are spending billions of dollars each year promoting their products to teenagers.[12] Cultural anthropologists and adolescent psychology experts such as Thomas Hine and Robert Epstein are challenging the credibility of traditional psychosocial interpretations of adolescence.[13] Today, those striving to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship have a significant challenge in keeping up with factors affecting the adolescent psychosocial and spiritual developmental journey.

Youth Ministry: America's Religious Response to a Developing Youth Culture

During the century before Hall brought adolescence as a life stage into the American consciousness, many were becoming concerned about how adolescent spiritual development was being affected by the Industrial Revolution. Many young persons were moving away from their homes and urban centers in order to find work and prosperity. Alarmed that many of these young persons appeared to be disconnected from the Church, concerned Christians began to seek ways to expose them to the gospel, forming Christian

[10] Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 4-11.

[11] See the bibliography of this paper for a sampling of such texts available today.

[12] Walt Mueller, *Youth Culture 101* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 220.

[13] Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* and Robert Epstein, *Teen 2.0: Saving Our Children and Families from the Torment of Adolescence* (Fresno, CA: Linden Publishing, 2010).

organizations outside of the established churches. Such ministries included the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). Both the YMCA and YWCA focused on religious and moral guidance, but they also provided for the practical needs and desires of late adolescents and emerging adults. The Sunday school began as another parachurch ministry run by lay people who targeted young people for evangelization, in this case through academic instruction. Each of these movements began in England and was incorporated in the United States where they maintained a strong presence over the mid-nineteenth century.[14]

As adolescence became a recognized developmental period, the American Church first resisted the movement to segregate youth from adults in faith communities, fearing that parachurch ministries would attract youth away from church life and denominational goals. Adolescents were, in fact, finding more meaningful outlets for their faith in ministries such as overseas missions not sanctioned by the denominations. Rather than foster the passion to do God's work in the world, which was at the center of adolescent faith, many church leaders saw youth ministry only as a means to foster leaders within their own faith communities. The churches responded to their youth choosing to live their faith in parachurch ministries "outside of the denominations" by demanding that youth, and their expressions of faith, change in order to be included as part of the

[14] See Dunn and Senter, *Reaching a Generation for Christ*, 107-108. See also Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 109-112; YWCA, "History," http://www.ywca.org/site/c.cuIRJ7NTKrLaG/b.7515891/k.C524/History.htm (accessed December 19, 2012); and YMCA, "History," http://www.ymca.net/history/1800-1860s.html (accessed December 19, 2012).

"established" Church.[15] One method the churches used to "recapture" the youth was to form youth-focused organizations within their own denominations.

One of the most celebrated of these youth-focused organizations, and one of the most successful by numerical measurement, was the Christian Endeavor movement. Christian Endeavor began in 1881 as an effort of Dr. Francis Clark and the Williston Congregational Church in Portland, Maine to evangelize young people by partnering with them in Bible study and service work. Youth Christianity was expressed by these activities.[16] In less than ten years, the "Christian Endeavor pledge" was expanded to include loyal attendance within a community of faith. Other mainline denominations followed suit by creating similar youth associations with foci of their own, which reflected their particular theologies of youth spirituality and Christian growth. Even at youth ministry's "beginning," its theology and praxis were varied according to that of each community of faith. Many of the governing documents, "handbooks," and "pledges" of different denominational youth ministries indicate that while spirituality or Christian growth was at the heart of the efforts, church leaders defined discipleship as actions the adolescent performed and their denominational loyalty rather than internal life-changing transformation based on trust in Jesus as Lord of the young person's life.[17]

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[15] Richard R. Dunn and Mark H. Senter, III, *Four Views of Youth Ministry and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), xi-xii.

[16] Christian Endeavor, "History," http://christianendeavor.com/history (accessed December 19, 2012). Francis Edward Clark, *The Children and the Church* (Boston: Congregational Sunday School and Publishing Society, 1882), 44-47, Google e-book.

[17] Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 59-62. See also Youth Ministry Staff of the General Board of Discipleship, *United Methodist Youth Fellowship Handbook* (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1980), 3, 5; and Robinson, *The Epworth League*.

By the middle of the twentieth century, American churches were practicing their own youth ministry efforts. Youth ministries in mainline denominations focused on Christian education and social justice, while evangelicals emphasized evangelism and personal piety. Denominations formed "youth fellowships," a strategy featuring youth-led gatherings that combined Christian education with fellowship.[18] Upon returning from WWII, veterans who gave less importance to denominational boundaries than to reaching youth with the gospel of Christ formed parachurch ministries in an attempt to answer the failure of the youth fellowship ministry model to effectively evangelize non-churched adolescents. Church leaders as well as those not tied to particular denominations began to look at high school campuses as a missionary field.

The Miracle Book Club founded by Evelyn McCluskey in 1933 brought students into homes for Bible study. This ministry grew nationwide and spawned Young Life, whose first leader, Jim Rayburn, focused specifically on reaching unchurched youth on high school campuses. Rayburn designed a highly relational "club" ministry where Christian youth brought non-Christian friends to adult-led gatherings designed to introduce students to Jesus Christ.

Over the next several decades, Youth for Christ, which initially had centered ministry efforts on Saturday night "rallies," took the Young Life concept of reaching high school students with the gospel, but emphasized on-campus student initiatives and leadership. Both Young Life and Youth for Christ used an entertainment model to

[18] Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 62-64. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Practicing Passion: Youth and the Quest for a Passionate Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 8. Lillian Tam, "United Christian Youth Movement," *The Friend* CXV, no. 3 (March 1, 1945), http://server2.honweb.com/mhm-friend/cgi-bin/mhm-friend?a=d&d=Friend19450301-01.2.18&cl=CL1.Friend&srpos=0&dliv=none&st=1&e=-------en-20--1--txt-IN----- (accessed December 20, 2012).

engage students to commit their lives to Christ and to witness to their peers over the thirty years post-WWII.[19] The theology of youth ministry during this time focused largely on personal sin, repentance, and piety. Later, Young Life and Youth for Christ would practice more missional and relational models of youth ministry, seeking to enter the world of adolescents in order to better understand their spiritual needs.[20] Denominations incorporated many of the parachurch ministry strategies into their own. Young Life and Youth for Christ produced many who are leaders in professional youth ministry today. From the Youth for Christ movement came two youth ministers who would form the youth worker resourcing entity known as Youth Specialties and its heavily attended annual National Youth Worker Conventions.

As youth ministry entered the latter part of the twentieth century and the new millennium, the landscape of America changed significantly. The population became much more diverse and pluralistic. Growing affluence among American teenagers gave them more freedom in their choices and made them less dependent on their parents.[21] Marketers lured children and adolescents with a gospel of materialism.[22] Moral relativism led many to a gospel of "moralistic, therapeutic deism."[23] American adolescents began to more discernibly exhibit the effects of living in and through a

[19] Pete Ward, "Why Can't Youth Ministry Grow Up?" *Youth Worker Journal* 28 *(*July/August 2012): 48.

[20] Senter, *When God Shows Up*, 276.

[21] Ibid., 276-280.

[22] Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, 215-244.

[23] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 162-166.

culture of abandonment. [24] Youth ministries strived to keep pace with the rapidly changing culture by continuing to seek the most effective ministry models for their contexts. Many churches hired staff to engage in relational ministry to and with their young, hoping to meet adolescents' spiritual needs in a fast-shifting society. Youth ministry became more professionalized, with more Christian colleges and seminaries offering undergraduate and post-graduate degrees in the concentration. Youth for Christ veterans Wayne Rice and Mike Yaconelli formed Youth Specialties, which has become arguably the largest youth worker resourcing organization in the world and upon which many youth ministries within the United States look for guidance. Youth Specialties' National Youth Worker Convention was designed to assist youth workers by providing training in discipling adolescents.

Those studying the "results" of youth ministry have revealed mixed outcomes with respect to youth entering into and retaining a trusting, transforming, lasting relationship with Jesus as their Lord who live their faith within a community of believers in that same Jesus Christ.[25] The foci and praxes of previously mentioned youth ministry efforts explain this at least in part. The effects of abandonment of adolescents by adults, the creation of an individualistic culture, and the resulting lengthening of adolescence has

[24] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 23-41.

[25] Fuller Youth Institute estimates that 50 to 60 percent of high school graduates remain in a faith relationship with Jesus as Lord of their lives. See Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*. Also see Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, for an in-depth commentary on the status of faith in adolescents. Kenda Creasy Dean, *Almost Christian: What the Faith of Our Teenagers Is Telling the American Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010) presents what the 2005 National Study of Youth Religion findings on the faith practices of American youth could mean in their individual lives and to the Church.

also led to fewer young adults landing as adults who live lives of robust discipleship.[26] The differing theologies and praxes of various denominations, parachurch ministries, and of individual youth workers for that matter leads to differences in the "defined target" or purpose of any youth ministry being considered.

According to Dunn and Senter, youth ministry has historically been most effective when theology, relationships, and purposeful action have been equally emphasized in "discipleship balance." However, when youth ministers adapt youth ministry models to fit their own context, the balance can be shifted and in some cases, the resulting model can create an imbalance. This is especially true when one part of the triad receives an inordinate amount of emphasis to the extent that it becomes a "program" while the other two parts are deemphasized disproportionately.[27]

The "discipleship balance" offered by Dunn and Senter should provide a good measurement standard with some clarification of the contexts in which it will be applied. Theology will be evaluated in terms of a Christo-centric theology where discipleship is defined as trusting Jesus to bring God's righteousness that will guide youth into being part of God's work in the world and as part of a local faith community. Youth ministers' relationships with youth must respond to the current "abandoned" state of youth. Purposeful action is action of gratitude resulting from inner transformation of the adolescent rather than adults using such action as a performance-based "measuring stick" for the faith of adolescents.

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[26] Chap Clark comments on this specifically in Jennifer Bradbury, "Growing Up: The YouthWorker Journal Roundtable on Emerging Adulthood," *Youth Worker Journal* 28 (July/August 2012): 23.

[27] Dunn and Senter, *Reaching a Generation for Christ*, 109-110.

The UMC believes the purpose of Christ's Church is to "make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world."[28] Youth ministries that would nurture adolescents into lifelong disciples must first define for adolescents what it is to be a disciple. The original disciples often did not fully understand what Jesus was trying to teach them.[29] Many times they did not know what following Jesus would bring.[30] Their discipleship depended on their trust that Jesus was, as Peter's confession in Matthew 16 revealed, the son of the living God and on their belief in Jesus's promise in John 6 that he knew and held that which was best for them. The disciples trusted Jesus and followed him while he was alive, and they followed his example and instruction after he was gone as a result of the trust that was built in their relationship with him. United Methodist youth ministries that are focused, designed, and implemented with the purpose to nurture youth into lifelong disciples reveal to adolescents a kingdom trajectory reflective of a Galatians 5 theology. Adolescents cared for by a church in ways that are evident to them can be enabled to actively wait for God's Holy Spirit to transform them from within through their trust in Jesus.

When the Reverend John Bunyon Robinson began to wonder if it could be that the Methodist Church had initially placed expectations upon youth for which the Church had not adequately prepared them, he was considering the idea that the Church had somehow unintentionally and unknowingly abandoned its adolescents. Robinson had the

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[28] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 87.

[29] Examples are found in Matthew 13:37, Matthew 15:15, Matthew 16:5-12, Mark 4:13, Mark 7:17-18, and John 11:11-14.

[30] Examples include Mark 6:35-44, Mark 8:31-38, Mark 9:2-13, Mark 10:13-16, Luke 8:22-25, and Luke 8:49-52, and John 11:11-44.

ministerial process and the welfare of adolescents fully in mind. When Robinson designed the Epworth League as an intergenerational youth ministry where youth and adults worked together to promote and further God's kingdom, he focused on the correct trajectory and target for youth ministry. Robinson was concerned most with discipling the young in a relational manner rather than entertaining them. Robinson also revealed a "ministry is the process" approach to youth ministry. Robinson believed a kingdom trajectory would be established for adolescents in the Church through the relationships built between youth and the adults with whom they worked.

Making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world through journeying together in relational ways reflects the Wesleyan concept of grace to those being discipled. An intergenerational, relational approach to discipling adolescents also parallels a Wesleyan concept of salvation as a life process of trusting Jesus to bring one to "perfection,"[31] while actively waiting on God's Holy Spirit to bring one to righteousness. Robinson's approach to youth ministry contained Wesleyan concepts that contemporary research indicates can be potentially successful in order to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship.

From an exhortation standpoint, the current *Book of Discipline* of the UMC offers a somewhat mixed message to disciplers of adolescents. As the *Book of Discipline* is largely a governing document for the Church, detailed instruction on youth ministry may not reasonably be expected to be found within the book's contents. However because the

[31] Wesleyans define such moving to "Christian perfection" as "sanctification." Wesleyans assert that "salvation" is a lifelong journey of "sanctification" where a justified person is, through the working of God's Holy Spirit, striving to become more and more like Jesus Christ in all aspects of their lives. This striving is evidenced by Christian acts of love in service to God and others. See George E. Koehler, *The United Methodist Member's Handbook*, 78-79.

Book of Discipline provides general theological instruction and also exhorts practical application of that theology, the *Book of Discipline* is responsible to be consistent in matching the former to the latter.

The *Book of Discipline* uses language in its theology of youth ministry that reveals a deep concern for adolescents and their inclusion in the Church. To its credit, this governing resource places responsibility for discipling the young in an intergenerational manner across the Church.[32] The *Book of Discipline* charges each local church to include youth in facilitating the church's ministries in such a way as to prevent age discrimination,[33] effectively granting adolescents social capital[34] within the church.

The *Book of Discipline* is not instructional with regard to youth ministry. That is not the purpose of the resource. In directing the application of youth ministry, however, the *Book of Discipline* reverts to denominational interests and language that does not reflect relational youth ministry strategy necessary to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. The items mentioned are worthy and beneficial, reflective of actions a youth ministry might take in thankfulness to God while actively awaiting the righteousness of God's Holy Spirit. But the *Book of Discipline* prioritizes these actions in its application of youth ministry theology. A more relational, missional approach might be to first direct applications of youth ministry based on a hermeneutic of adoption

[32] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 598.

[33] Ibid., 158.

[34] "Social capital" refers to the recognition of inherent value in and resulting legitimacy granted to an individual or group of individuals within the society in which they live and operate to the end that the lives of those being granted social capital are made more fulfilling. See Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 18-25. Putnam links social capital strongly with "belonging." Belonging, or reconnection, as the third leg of the adolescent journey, is a major contributor in determining, from a psychosocial standpoint, if a late adolescent moves healthily into early adulthood.

for youth ministry, then point to potential and specific ministry opportunities inspired by God's Holy Spirit. Such actions would then be understood to be reflective of those conducted in thankfulness by adolescents being nurtured toward lifelong discipleship.

What to Take Forward; What to Leave Behind

The "discipleship balance" offered by Dunn and Senter provides a solid standard for determining which facets of the Church's past approach to youth ministry for nurturing adolescents toward lifelong discipleship should be taken forward and which should be left behind. A theology of youth ministry that is Christo-centric, in which discipleship is defined as trusting Jesus to bring God's righteousness that will guide youth into being part of God's work in the world, and that encourages youth to be active participants of a local faith community, is an adoptive youth ministry theology that should be taken forward. Youth ministers' relationships with youth must respond to the current "abandoned" state of youth through relationships that grant social capital to adolescents. Adult-to-adolescent relationships are to encourage healthy adolescent psychosocial development by helping adolescents to cultivate their trust in Jesus. Purposeful action is defined as action of gratitude resulting from inner transformation of the adolescent rather than adults attempting to elicit such action as a performance-based "measuring stick" for the faith of adolescents or employing a strategy of "sin management" as a means to define one's discipleship.

Children and adolescents are more likely nurtured toward lifelong discipleship when disciplers invest social capital in adolescents' lives. Clark offers, "Our cultural ethos of bigger, faster, and splashier does not apply to the issues facing contemporary

adolescents. They need adults who are aware of the power of small, deliberate, and consistently authentic applications of relational concern, care and nurture. . . . The biggest need every student has is satisfied in an adult who is there for him or her."[35] Therefore, Robinson's concepts of building intergenerational relationships within the Church as a way to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship correspond with contemporary research that supports the same.

Jesus granted social capital to children by holding them up verbally in public as examples of those who trust God in ways Jesus wished for all humankind to do. While others saw children as valueless until they were of the age at which they could to contribute in culturally accepted ways, Jesus valued them merely because they wished to be with him.[36] A Christo-centric theology of youth ministry is revealed when adults in the contemporary Church grant adolescents social capital in the same manner as Jesus did with children in his time. Adults also reveal a Christo-centric theology of youth ministry and grant youth social capital when they allow adolescents time and space to actively wait for God's Holy Spirit to guide youth toward righteousness by lovingly journeying with adolescents throughout the psychosocial and spiritual development process.

Powell and Clark provide research which demonstrates that adult parishioners granting social capital to teenagers by showing an interest in and getting to know them make adolescents feel welcome and valued. Such an approach to the application of youth ministry far outweighs the effects of programming or events and makes adolescents feel

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[35] Clark, *Hurt 2.0*, 191.

[36] C. A. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20*, vol. 34B of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2001), 94, Logos Bible Software 5. Biblical examples of Jesus granting social capital to children include Mark 10:15-16, Luke 9:46-48, and Luke 18:15-17.

"like a significant part of the church."[37] This particular finding further bolsters the concept proposed by Robinson that a relational, intergenerational approach to youth ministry as a shared lifelong journey will be more helpful in nurturing adolescents toward lifelong discipleship.[38] Therefore, youth ministry strategies that focus on programming or events done for the sake of youth, but in which adolescents are treated other than unique individuals each with distinctive gifts from God's Holy Spirit, are better left behind.

[37] Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 99.

[38] Catherine Stonehouse states, "When young and old in the community of faith – the family of God – journey together in commitment to one another led by God, beautiful, enriching spiritual formation occurs for all." See Catherine Stonehouse, *Joining Children on the Spiritual Journey: Nurturing a Life of Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1998), 195.

CHAPTER 5

ECCLESIOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A missional church's approach to adolescents is to seek out, invite, accept, and disciple adolescents. In his chapter titled, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," Mark Lau Branson claims, "The Church as a hermeneutic of the gospel is salt, light, and a city on a hill: the Church loves, does good, seeks justice, brings healing, celebrates, proclaims the gospel, and invites."[1] As such, a missional church embraces and reflects aspects of adoption of its youth in attempting to disciple them for lifelong faithfulness, recognizing abandoned adolescents as contemporary Western culture's "last, least and lost." The adaptive change of embracing and incorporating a hermeneutic of adoption as the core strategy toward youth ministry requires that the Church sees mission as foundational to its identity and understands what is meant by an adoptive approach to discipling youth. It is therefore appropriate and necessary to explore ecclesiological applications from the missional church perspective and relate those applications to an adoptive approach to youth ministry.

[1] Mark Lau Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," *The Missional Church in Context*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 114.

A contemporary definition of ecclesiology can be understood to be the study of the Church as an assembly called out from society to be followers of Jesus Christ. The term *ecclesiology*, which means "the study of the Church," comes from the Greek word "*ecclesia*," which means "assembly."[2] In his book on systematic theology, L. Berkhof breaks the term down further, reporting that *ecclesia* derives from the Greek preposition *ek*, which means "out from" and the verb *kaleo*, which means "to call from among the common mass of the people."[3] Jesus first used the term in Matthew 16:18, referring to those assembled around him who believed in and claimed him as their Lord, and who accepted the principles of God's kingdom as Jesus defined and exemplified those principles. As is true for doctrine and theology, ecclesiology will inform the Church regarding how to disciple those searching for God's truth in the person of Jesus Christ.

Missional church ecclesiology sees the Church not as the endpoint of the gospel, but as the instrument by which God accomplishes the purpose of the gospel. In his book, *Missional Church*, Darrell Guder writes, "Mission means 'sending,' and is the central biblical theme describing the purpose of God's action in human history."[4] In his *Introduction to Ecclesiology*, Veli-Matti Karkkainen describes missional ecclesiology thusly: "The new conciliar understanding of mission is based on the idea that the essential nature of the Church is missionary, rather than mission being a task given to the

[2] Mark A. House, *Compact Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2008), 57.

[3] L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 1938), 556, Logos Bible Software 5.

[4] Guder, *Missional Church*, 5.

Church."[5] Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk agree in their book, *Missional Leader*, stating, "Mission is not a program or project some people in the Church do from time to time (as in 'mission trip,' or 'mission budget'); the Church's very nature is to be God's missionary people."[6]

Abraham was called and sent to become God's nation of Israel. In Genesis 12:2 God tells Israel that the nation was "blessed to be a blessing" to the surrounding nations. The salvific work of God through Christ, not just for the Jewish nation but for the entire world, and the work of God's Holy Spirit enduring to the present continue God's plan for the redemption of all humankind.[7] Today, by the power of the Holy Spirit, it is the work of the Church to obey God's command to "go" to those abandoned by society and culture until God brings final consummation in the eschaton.[8] These are fundamental ecclesiological understandings of the missional church that apply directly to those who recognize the systemic abandonment of adolescents and would therefore reach out to and nurture those adolescents toward lifelong discipleship through a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry.

Viewing the Church through a Trinitarian lens as the *missio Dei*, Migliore maintains that God exists as an eternally triune God whose persons live in a mutually

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[5] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical, & Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 150.

[6] Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader: Equipping Your Church to Reach a Changing World* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), xv.

[7] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 265.

[8] Guder, *Missional Church*, 5. David J. Bosch also writes on the triune God "sending" the present-day Church as a means to reach the world with the gospel, representing this sending as the Church's purpose. See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991).

self-giving love. Because this is true, God extends this same self-giving love to the world. Migliore explains, "The mission of the Church has its basis and model in this movement of God to the world, this missio Dei or divine missionary activity. The reconciling mission of the incarnate Word and the transforming mission of the Spirit identify the God of Christian faith as a missionary God."[9] Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth also comprehended *missio Dei* as the ancient Church's understanding of the triune God's sending of God's self, in the persons of Jesus the Son and the Holy Spirit, in order to form the Church with the expressed purpose to reconcile the world to God.[10] For Barth, the Church existed because God was a "sending God." This sending of the Church is modeled after God becoming incarnate in Jesus Christ for the salvation of the world. Therefore it is the purpose of the Church to "go" in order to reconcile the world under the guidance of God's Holy Spirit today.

Terri Martinson Elton, a contributor to Craig Van Gelder's *The Missional Church in Context*, also understands the *missio Dei* as the purpose of the Church formed through the lens of a two-faceted Trinitarian understanding of God.[11] One facet is the "sending" nature of the God-head, as the Father sends the Son and the Father and Son send the Holy Spirit into the world. In the same manner, the Trinitarian God then also sends the Church into the world.[12] The second applicable facet is the unity among the Godhead. Van

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[9] Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 266.

[10] Karl Barth, *Classic Texts in Mission and World Christianity*, ed. Norman E. Thomas (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), 106.

[11] Terri Martinson Elton, "Corps of Discovery: A Twenty-First-Century Contextual Missiology for the Denominational Church in the United States," *The Missional Church in Context*, ed. Craig Van Gelder (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2007), 147.

[12] Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission,* 390.

Gelder describes this aspect of the Trinity as a "tri-unity, a social community of three persons within the Godhead."[13] This two-faceted view of God leads one to see a sending, communal Trinitarian God creating, sending, and going with the Church to reach and redeem the world. Elton parallels the Wesleyan view of God as primary actor in salvific work when she states, "This means that God has been, is, and will be active in the world. We, as God's Church, simply must seek to participate in God's mission in the world."[14]

Eastern Church scholar Vladimir Lossky conveys that Eastern ecclesiology understands the Church as the very image of the Trinity.[15] Karkkainen asserts that individuals who make up the Church are created in the image of a Trinitarian God.[16] Kallistos Ware, in his book, *The Orthodox Church*, links the Church tightly with the Trinity, stating, "The Church as a whole is an icon of the Trinity."[17] This view of the Church and the individuals who make it up, as the image of the Trinity, also emphasizes the communal nature of the Church as a reflection of Trinitarian God. The application to an adoptive approach in nurturing abandoned adolescents toward lifelong discipleship is that no developing disciple is to travel alone. The communal, missional, adoptive Church is to undertake the adolescent psychosocial and spiritual journey with youth traversing that journey.

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[13] Craig Van Gelder, *The Essence of the Church: A Community Created by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 96.

[14] Elton, *The Missional Church in Context*, 147.

[15] Vladimir Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976), 196-197.

[16] Karkkainen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology*, 19.

[17] Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin Books, 1993), 240.

In their book, *The Missional Church in Perspective*, Craig Van Gelder and Dwight Zscheile describe a facet of missional church ecclesiology that also provides a crucial link between a church being "missional" in purpose and its attempts to nurture adolescents toward a lifetime of discipleship. Comprehending mission as the result of God's initiative which manifests as the Church, they understand the purpose of that mission to be sent for the restoration and healing of creation.[18] The missional church therefore embraces a foundational belief and approach that is crucial in nurturing abandoned adolescents toward lifelong discipleship; such discipleship must entail a restorative and healing aspect of ministry in order to help restore the trust lost by contemporary adolescents.

Guder provides another foundational precept of missional church ecclesiology that can instruct disciplers of contemporary adolescents striving to respond to and counter the systemic abandonment of youth. Guder points out that there are negative cultural dynamics the Church has always encountered and must oppose. Oppression, exclusivity, and racism are societal norms with which the Church has historically battled and to which a missional-focused church offers an alternative community. The church that embraces a hermeneutic of adoption in order to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship can offer adolescent victims of Western culture's norm of systemic abandonment an "alternative community" in which youth find safety, compassion, encouragement while they develop psychosocially and spiritually as they undertake the adolescent journey.[19]

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[18] Craig Van Gelder and Dwight J. Zscheile, *The Missional Church in Perspective: Mapping Trends and Shaping the Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011), 3.

[19] Guder, *Missional Church*, 10.

Theologian Ray Anderson, in his book, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, offers a Christo-centric view of ecclesiology, explaining that Jesus formed a community that offered all, especially those deemed socially unacceptable, a place in a manner that models how abandoned adolescents need the Church to live toward and with them. Anderson writes,

> In drawing persons around him, Jesus recreated humanity in a community of shared life and common identity. Even the narrower circle, defined by the specific calling of the Twelve, was structurally open to the 'unclean leper," the tormented demoniac, the self-righteous Pharisee, the woman of ambiguous reputation. In contact with Jesus, humanity was liberated from the blind and capricious powers of nature and disease, as well as the cruel social and religious tyranny of the powerful over the weak. In the real humanity of Jesus we see the humanization as well as the socialization of humanity.[20]

Jesus created a new community that offered solace, peace, and purpose to the last, lost, and least. The missional church practicing from a Christo-centric ecclesiological model comes alongside abandoned adolescents and offers a type of "humanization" to those seeking identity, autonomy, and reconnection as they navigate the psychosocial and spiritual challenges of the adolescent journey. Such Christo-centric nurture may serve the Church well as it seeks to disciple adolescents for the long term.

Branson interprets God's grace as a gift applicable to missional church ecclesiology and with respect to discipling adolescents given in order to build up the Church through such outreach. He writes, "God's grace—that is, God's initiatives throughout Scripture, God's love for the world, God's missional heart, and God's great redeeming presence in Jesus Christ—is to be most clearly visible and tangible in faith

[20] Anderson, *The Shape of Practical Theology*, 253.

communities."[21] Branson warns that, although God's word was originally given to shape messianic communities, those in Western culture all too often take in God's word only to attempt to apply Scripture in individual faith endeavors rather than within the community of faith. Those communities are to respond to this gift of grace, allowing themselves to be formed, shaped, and called as a missional presence that forms, shapes, and calls others who are or who would be in their care. Branson believes God's grace is to form the Church in such ways that the Church then offers that same grace to others.

Wesleyan doctrine, and specifically United Methodist ecclesiology, takes a pragmatic approach to understanding and living God's grace in ways that are in synch with discipling adolescents for the long term. Wesley's teaching reveals his belief in God's grace and its availability to all—justification by grace through faith, assurance of salvation and sanctification of the believer. Wesley however combined these precepts in a way that emphasized that thankful action in one's everyday life is an expression of one's living faith in Christ. Wesley believed humankind was saved by God's love exhibited by God's grace and is also accountable to God for actions of thankful response to that grace. Wesley preached, wrote, and forwarded the writings of others that provided guidance which he hoped would "enhance Methodist's experience of God's grace, deepen their knowledge of the faith, and at the same time challenge them to live a more holy life."[22] Wesley believed in and proclaimed active discipleship. His purpose was that his sermons would not be taken as mere philosophical discourse, but would motivate hearers to open themselves to God's Holy Spirit resulting in an infusion of God's grace

[21] Branson, "Ecclesiology and Leadership for the Missional Church," 94.

[22] Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life* (New York: General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church, 1996), 14.

that would be transformative in their daily discipleship. Those who receive Christ as savior receive God's justifying grace, and are forgiven of all sin. Thus, Sanctification occurs as a result of God's grace, as persons accept God's molding of their lives, minds, and hearts to be closer to that of God's will for humankind. This "molding" was understood by Wesley to be "holiness of heart and life"[23] equal to "sanctification," also considered equivalent to "righteousness" referred to by Paul in Galatians 5. Evangelism and acts of social justice are manifestations of this sanctification as a result of God's Holy Spirit transforming the believer. Wesley believed as does Branson that those who are saved by grace through faith are "new creations" who then are to reach others who do not yet realize God's love for them and God's grace available to them.

Exhibiting this Wesleyan understanding of God's grace to be spiritually transformative and the believer's response to that grace manifesting in thankful service as a doctrinal and ecclesiological foundation point, the United Methodist Church sees its theological task as contextual, incarnational, and practical.[24] Jesus Christ came among humankind in human form as God's supreme model of self-revelation in God's perfect timing and placement. Christians are to follow suit, involving themselves in the world as Christ's representatives, where God has placed them in order to liberate all who are in bondage to sin. Wesleyan ecclesiology is that one's faith is borne out in practical application. The Wesleyan Christian incorporates the promises and demands of the gospel of Jesus Christ into daily living that shares God's love in such a way that human need is answered.

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[23] Yrigoyen, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*, 24.

[24] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 76.

The UMC adheres to Wesley's contention that God is always the actor and humans are the responders.[25] Wesley defined God's "prevenient grace" as God's "preventing grace," that is, part of "all the drawings of the Father; the desires after God, which, if we yield to them, increase more and more;—all that light wherewith the Son of God enlighteneth every one that cometh into the world, showing every man 'to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with his God.'"[26] Wesley believed God is always acting to recover and redeem each person even before one is aware of one's need for God in his or her life and before one is aware of God's unique plan for his or her life. Even the person's ability to realize and respond to God's call on one's life is fully dependent upon God's prevenient grace to enable such realization and response. Wesley's contention was that one's personal response to the gospel, initiated by God's grace, results from an internal transformation that manifests in acts of both piety and devotion, such as serving God by answering the social concerns of God's people.[27] Such transformation enabled people to be freed from the bondage of sin, Christ to be glorified, and Christ's Church to be built up.[28]

As discussed in Chapter 2, one of the origins of Methodism's missional ecclesiology, drawn from Wesley's practical approach to theology, was the formation of

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[25] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 45-47.

[26] John Wesley, *The Scripture Way of Salvation*, ed. Anne-Elizabeth Powell, for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-43-the-scripture-way-of-salvation/ (accessed August 19, 2013).

[27] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 49.

[28] John Wesley, *The General Spread of the Gospel*, ed. Syl Hunt IV, for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-63-the-general-spread-of-the-gospel/ (accessed November 3, 2013).

"The Holy Club." Initiated by Charles Wesley on the campus of Christ Church College, and later supported by Charles's brother John Wesley, The Holy Club began as a Bible study group that was dedicated to correct student's academic dishonesty. As they gathered for prayer, Bible study, and fellowship in order to prepare for and battle both the issue and the repercussions from their stance, the Holy Club members soon began to also discover many needs within their immediate community. Club members began to practice their theology, performing such "social justice" actions as feeding those in need and visiting those jailed in local prisons. Wesleyans continued this outreach to the "last, lost, and least" within their context in North America when the Church of England refused colonists sacraments of Holy Communion and Baptism because the Anglican Church viewed the colonists as traitors to the throne of England. Not being able to stomach the thought of anyone being outside of these "means of grace,"[29] as the sacraments are known in Wesleyan theology, Methodist pastors ordained themselves and began administering the sacraments to colonists they saw as having been abandoned by the Anglican Church.[30] Wesley was soon to break from the Church of England,

[29] Wesley defined the "means of grace" as such: "By 'means of grace' I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he (God) might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace." Wesley identified the means of grace to be "prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord's Supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him: And these we believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men." Wesley emphasized the means of grace were not an end unto themselves, but practices that persons pursue in order to become more open, through God's grace, to God's transformative love resulting in an ever deepening trust in God to bring one to righteousness and to empower one to be God's spokesperson to the world. See John Wesley, *The Means of Grace*, ed. Darin Million, for the Wesley Center for Applied Theology at Northwest Nazarene University, http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/the-sermons-of-john-wesley-1872-edition/sermon-16-the-means-of-grace/ (accessed November 3, 2013).

[30] Frederick A. Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1974), 90-93.

ordaining other ministers in the Methodist movement in order to minister to those abandoned by the Anglican Church.

As his movement began to take on the form of a new denomination, it was supremely important to Wesley that the Church live out its belief in Jesus as Christ as an active, pragmatic witness to the world. Wesley stated that this was his vision for the Church. Though he claimed not to be concerned that the Methodist movement would ever cease to exist, Wesley did in fact express concern that "they should only exist as a dead sect" if they ever abandoned active faith that manifested in personal piety, the spread of the gospel, the pursuit of righteousness and the practice of social justice.[31] A missional understanding of reaching abandoned children of God was part of the origins of Wesleyan ecclesiology.[32]

Wesley understood that in order for a church to live an active faith it would need to be bold and "missional." In order to respond to God's grace in ways that would transform the world as a reflection of the way God's Holy Spirit transforms individual souls and lives, this church would need to place its full trust in Jesus as the head of the church. Wesley believed the church was well equipped to be missional in evangelism and service through its trust in Jesus to guide and deliver. Charles Yrigoyen, Jr., writing on the life and works of John Wesley, explains, "Wesley was adamant in stating that faith is more than embracing certain facts. It is not simply believing in the existence of God or believing that Jesus is the Savior of the world. Genuine faith is total trust, reliance, and

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[31] Rupert E. Davies, *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design,* vol. 9 of *The Works of John Wesley* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 527.

[32] This Wesleyan ecclesiology dovetails agreeably with Guder's precept that the missional church is to be active in "being the witness, doing the witness, and saying the witness." See Darrell Guder, *Be My Witnesses: The Church's Mission, Message, and Messengers* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

confidence in the grace of God evident in the person and work of Christ as prophet, priest, and king."[33] The Methodist Church strove to meet this standard of missional witness. As the Industrial Revolution changed the landscape of America and people migrated to urban centers, the Methodist Church responded to these changes by creating ministries that endeavored to meet the spiritual and practical needs of displaced populations in both crowded urban centers and vacated rural areas.[34]

Today the UMC applies a missional approach to the Church's definition of Christian living. The *Book of Discipline* states, "We insist that personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. Scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice and renewal in the life of the world."[35] Methodist ecclesiology derives directly from Wesley's preaching and teaching that the Christian life is to be an active life, "infused with God's love and enacting that love in community with the neighbor."[36] Such an ecclesiology positions parishioners in the UMC for receptivity to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry that nurtures adolescents toward lifelong discipleship.

This receptivity is verbalized through the liturgy professed by United Methodists during baptism and confirmation. Whether the baptisan is an infant or an adolescent, not only do the parents or legal guardians of the baptisan commit to discipling her or him, but the entire congregation pledges to do so. The UMC member response and commitment

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[33] Yrigoyen, *John Wesley: Holiness of Heart and Life*, 22.

[34] Norwood, *The Story of American Methodism*, 333.

[35] Alexander, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 47.

[36] Frank, *Polity, Practice, and the Mission of the United Methodist Church*, 60.

to baptisan and confirmation vows state, "With God's help we will proclaim the good news and live according to the example of Christ. We will surround these persons with a community of love and forgiveness that they may grow in their trust of God and be found faithful in their service to others. We will pray for them that they may be true disciples who walk in the way that leads to life."[37] A church body who lives these vows will bless the young with the love and wisdom available in intergenerational approaches to ministry to, with, for, and through youth and adults journeying in faith together. Those advocating for and embracing youth in such a way will bless the church by deliberately revealing to other adults the passion, immediacy, and urgency of adolescents. This approach incorporates a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. It reflects a missional, Wesleyan ecclesiology that incorporates theology, relationship, and purposeful action of those who understand "trusting Jesus" as their working definition of discipleship and who reach to abandoned adolescents by journeying with them incarnationally.

Dean offers practical advice as to how a Wesleyan church that practices a missional ecclesiology might also battle systemic abandonment of adolescents, nurturing them toward lifelong discipleship incarnationally. Dean alleges that "mission is essentially translation."[38] Just as Jesus' mission was to be God's translation to the world, youth disciplers are to be Jesus' translation to youth. Dean claims that youth workers too often make the mistake of only wanting to teach youth, while not living their lives as the loving translation of Jesus among youth. Youth workers too often strive to give information, but do not live incarnationally among youth in order to help them achieve

[37] See General Board of Discipleship, *United Methodist Hymnal*, 33-39.

[38] Kenda Creasy Dean, "Game-Changing Grace" (main session address to the Baltimore Washington Annual Conference, Baltimore Waterfront Marriott, Baltimore, MD, June 5, 2009).

transformation through discipleship to Christ. Youth disciplers often talk too much without loving adolescents enough, overemphasizing imparting knowledge to adolescents rather than living missionally with adolescents. Dean advises disciplers of adolescents to love Christ first and then to live missionally among youth because "it's easier to share what you love." In the same vein, for adolescents seeking individuation, Dean claims, "It is easier for youth to learn and live what they love."[39]

There are aspects of missional and Wesleyan ecclesiology that, if practiced, prepare a church well to embrace and carry out a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry in order to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. Offering God's grace, first received by the discipler, is very likely to be welcomed by adolescents who feel they have been abandoned during the challenging adolescent journey to individuation. Adults in the church first must take responsibility for those adolescents abandoned by a narcissistic culture and then commit to living missionally and incarnationally among those to be discipled. This commitment is likely to cause churches to assess whether they are in fact living a hermeneutic of adoption toward adolescents in their care or if adults in the faith community are merely "showing interest" in their youth. Such an assessment may necessitate change in a church's youth ministry praxis.

[39] Kenda Creasy Dean, "Game-Changing Grace."

PART THREE

MINISTRY STRATEGY

CHAPTER 6

IMPLEMENTING THE ADAPTIVE CHANGE PROCESS

As disciplers of adolescents do relational ministry, those discipled see and feel the spirit at the heart of the ministry. This is because ministry is more than activity. Theology matters because theology shapes approach to ministry. Context matters because ministry is always relational. Ministry takes place between people.[1] Those on the receiving end of ministry interpret that the way in which ministers "do ministry" among them is the heart of the ministry.

Those discipling adolescents can easily find themselves in a results oriented mindset. This can happen when disciplers lose track of the importance of journeying with those whom they are striving to disciple, and minister as if seeing only an end result. Youth ministers attempting to implement a continuous adaptive change process in order to introduce a new paradigm such as a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry can stay focused on those within the ministry process by heeding Paul's instructions in Galatians 5:5, "For through the Spirit we eagerly await by faith the righteousness for

[1] Steve Argue discusses the importance of theology and approach to ministry as well as understanding the importance of ensuring the ministry process is faithful to one's foundational theology and is not just a means to justify the envisioned end. Fuller Youth Institute, "Steve Argue's Webcast Interview: Processes, Pitfalls, and Aha's of Implementing Sticky Faith," September 24, 2013, http://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/steve-argue-webcast-interview?utm_source=FYI+E-Journal&utm_campaign=0439879693-FYI+E- (accessed November 13, 2013).

which we hope." The "waiting" is active, led by God's Holy Spirit, done in love given by God's Holy Spirit for and with those within the ministry, accomplished in the time frame determined by God's Holy Spirit.

For young people whom God is claiming into lifelong discipleship in the UMC, adult congregants can fulfill a particular role. This role begins with the promise congregants make during the baptismal vows for those who have responded to God's call on their lives with faith in Jesus the Christ as Lord of their lives.[2] Church members respond to a charge to "do all in [our] power to increase their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love."[3] A church committed to nurturing youth toward lifelong discipleship must continually ask introspective questions, such as: "Are we living these vows? Do the ways we are receiving these young persons into the church resemble adoption into their new family? Are we taking the initiative to get to know them as individuals and as family members? Are we spending the time and effort it takes to embrace them, invest in them, and involve them in the life of the larger church in meaningful ways? Are we opening ourselves to them as members of their new family such that they will trust us to grow together as lifelong disciples of Christ? Are we as the church seeking to link adolescents with many adults from whom they can learn? Do we follow the biblical model we have been given and the vows we have taken by blessing adolescents with the love and wisdom available in intergenerational approaches to

[2] The UMC doctrine allows for baptism at any age. When an infant is baptized, the infant's sponsors (typically parents or legal guardians) and the entire congregation pledge to God to nurture the infant baptisan through teaching and example into discipleship of Jesus Christ through the local church. When an adolescent is baptized, the church responds to God and the adolescent directly in the same manner. See General Board of Discipleship, *United Methodist Hymnal*, 33-34.

[3] For baptismal, confirmation, and receiving new member's vows of the UMC, see General Board of Discipleship, *United Methodist Hymnal*, 33-53.

ministry to, with, for, and through youth and adults journeying in faith together? Do we bless our churches by deliberately revealing to all congregants the passion, immediacy, and urgency of our young? Are we deliberately nurturing adolescents into meaningful ministry in the church?"

Leading a youth ministry along with the entire worshipping body of a church into such a paradigm shift as a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry will challenge long-held assumptions, beliefs, and practices of St. Paul.[4] Those who are stakeholders of youth ministry at St. Paul will need to be convinced that while the vision remains adolescents who grow as lifelong disciples of Jesus the Christ, the entire church must significantly enhance methods of discipling youth by "adopting" youth more fully into the church family. This will be an adaptive change.

Implementing the Adaptive Change Process

Adaptive change processes are more difficult to facilitate for leaders because the process of change requires different approaches than does more conventional problem-solving. Adaptive changes require more from those affected with respect to the distinct possibility that they may have to shift the "frames" through which they operate. Such change may require one to challenge previously and sometimes deeply held values and practices. One cannot solve adaptive challenges by applying technical problem solving, though solving technical problems is much more familiar to most. In their book, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky explain, "Adaptive challenges can only be addressed through changes in people's

[4] The author of this project serves as the full-time youth pastor at St. Paul.

priorities, beliefs, habits, and loyalties. Making progress requires going beyond any authoritative expertise to mobilize discovery, shedding certain entrenched ways, tolerating losses, and generating the capacity to thrive anew."[5] While solving a technical problem implies the promise of a return to normal, solving an adaptive challenge means that things will never be the same again. Participants in the change will at some point need to realize that they and the situation can never go back to the way things were. To do so would mean failure to actually change in the ways required to address the issue.

In his book, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, Ronald Heifetz states that technical problems are those problems to which "we already know how to respond. These problems are technical because the necessary knowledge about them already has been digested and put in the form of a legitimized set of known organizational procedures guiding what to do and role authorizations guiding who should do it."[6] Technical challenges many times can be solved by time or money. Facts can be presented and absorbed with a reasonable expectation that the resulting transfer of knowledge can help solve the issue and that "things will return to normal" or improve.

An adaptive challenge is one for which technical methods are not effective. Heifetz continues, "For many adaptive problems however, no adequate response has yet been developed. . . . No clear cut expertise can be found, no single sage has credibility, no established procedure will suffice."[7] Sometimes the adaptive challenge will be

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[5] Ronald Heifetz, Alexander Grashow, and Marty Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2009), 19.

[6] Ronald Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 71-72.

[7] Ibid., 74.

concise and definable but will have no previously determined or evident solution. Some adaptive challenges, which are more difficult, present in such a way that even the problem itself is hard to define.

Perhaps the most critical aspect of solving an adaptive challenge, such as reinventing youth ministry so that adolescents are nurtured for lifelong discipleship, is that the locus of work to do so lies upon the stakeholders. This is contrary to what most are used to and with which most are comfortable. When solving technical problems, authority is called upon to provide answers. Policy, practices, procedures, and direct supervision are often the solutions to technical problems. Because adaptive challenges require learning, adaptation, and action on the part of all involved, the stakeholders are called upon to learn, embrace, and institute the change required to bring the organization to its new identity.

With respect to discipling youth for lifelong discipleship, the adaptive challenge appears to be definable. Research indicates that many youth are struggling with or leaving their faith journeys and the Church upon graduating from high school.[8] The Church may be able to affect this trend by embracing a hermeneutic of adoption toward its youth. No amount of time, money, or knowledge transfer can solve this issue. There is no one set of shoulders upon which responsibility can be placed. However, in the UMC, the congregation pledges to assist families in discipling their young through the

[8] Christian Smith and Patricia Snell performed follow-up research on the religious practices of emerging adults in the age range 18 to 23 who had been surveyed by the National Survey on Youth and Religion when they were in the age range 13 to 17. Smith and Snell's findings indicate measurable "decreases" in the religious practices of said emerging adults. See Christian Smith and Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), especially 118-120, 255, and 256.

local church. Doing the hard adaptive work of fulfilling this pledge will give the church a better chance to succeed in discipling adolescents for the long term.

St. Paul's history of youth ministry, while exhibiting a discernible passion toward adolescents in its care, indicates the church will require adaptive work in order to implement a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry in order to more effectively nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. In implementing the adaptive changes needed, St. Paul must leave some things behind and also preserve some of its current youth ministry approach. Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky explain the process of adaptation:

> Adaptation is a process of conservation as well as loss. Although the losses of change are the hard part, adaptive change is mostly not about change at all. The question is not only, "Of all that we care about, what must be given up to survive and thrive going forward?" but also "Of all that we care about, what elements are essential and must be preserved into the future, or we will lose precious values, core competencies, and lose who we are?" As in nature, a successful adaptation enables an organization or community to take the best from its traditions, identity, and history into the future.[9]

This adaptive change concept will apply not only to United Methodist foundational theology, but also to St. Paul's more recent history of ministering to youth.

Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie in their article titled, "The Work of Leadership," explain, "Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge."[10] This definition reveals why the changes required in order for St. Paul to enact a hermeneutic of adoption to disciple

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[9] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 19.

[10] Ronald Heifetz and Donald Laurie, "The Work of Leadership," *Harvard Business Review* (December 2001): 4. *Harvard Business Review* e-article.

students for a lifetime are adaptive changes rather than technical changes. There is however a technical aspect to the adaptive change required. All of the stakeholders will have to be educated on the theology of adoption before they can be expected to inhabit the concept. There is some amount of knowledge which must be transferred from the youth pastor, whose premise is that a hermeneutic of adoption as an approach to youth ministry will help to counter the systemic abandonment adolescents feel and better enable St. Paul to disciple students for a lifetime. The concept is likely to be new to all stakeholders. While the stakeholders already possess some of the values, traditions, and practices needed due to their current approach to youth ministry, all will need to be introduced to what adoption contains within this context.

This change will also necessitate that the stakeholders make major foundational changes in values, traditions, and practices in their approach to youth ministry. These foundational changes include shifts within the stakeholders' fundamental beliefs about what "being the church" is to and with adolescents, why the church exists (theology of adoption), the challenges of the adolescent psychosocial and spiritual journey, and the role of adolescents in life of church. The youth pastor must lead the stakeholders through the adaptive change process due to the fact that the values and practices for which the church was previously lauded for being successful in youth ministry will become less relevant when incorporating a hermeneutic of adoption. Because the youth pastor now believes any robust attempt to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship must be built on a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry, a new youth ministry strategy will need to be promulgated and embraced by the youth pastor and stakeholders.

Description of Stakeholders

In order to undertake the adaptive change needed to transition St. Paul to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry, congregants must change the way they think and minister. Though stakeholders and lesser involved congregants have been introduced to the concept, they are largely uneducated on adoptive youth ministry and are still operating under the assumption that what has been done to date is sufficient. In order to properly assess and implement needed adaptive changes, it is necessary to identify and describe stakeholders with respect to their condition as youth ministers who effectively practice adoptive youth ministry.

The first stakeholder is the senior pastor at St. Paul, who was appointed to the church in 2011. As mentioned in Chapter 2, he is thoughtful, open to new ideas, visionary, and supportive of a missional approach to ministry. The senior pastor is currently leading a vision team comprised of lay persons along with himself and the youth pastor. The purpose of the team is to establish a new vision for the church to make new disciples of Jesus Christ largely based on the intersection of the gifting of the congregation by God's Holy Spirit and the needs of the community for which these gifts best answer. The timing for instituting a hermeneutic of adoption as a way to disciple adolescents for their lifetime seems optimal.

Another stakeholder is the youth ministry team at St. Paul, which is committed to the youth and to the ministry. The team is comprised of several parents of youth, several young adults, several middle-aged adults, the youth pastor, and the youth pastor's wife.

Since being introduced to the concept of adoptive youth ministry, the youth ministry team members have become more open in sharing their own faith journeys with the youth. Several of the youth ministry team attends school and community activities in which adolescents participate. The youth ministry team is progressing in their adoptive approach to youth ministry.

The adult congregants of St. Paul are also stakeholders. Adults at the church cover a wide age range, from being in their late twenties to being in the latter stage of life. As discussed in Chapter 2, these adult congregants have been committed to the youth ministry during the history of the church, both financially as well as by assisting with certain youth events. A few adults in the congregation, mostly parents of young children and adolescents, take seriously their role of caring for and discipling children other than their own.

The parents of the youth at St. Paul are stakeholders as well. They are generally very busy, often commuting long hours to and from work. Some are involved in the spiritual nurture of their children, while others are not. Only a few of these parents significantly invest in the lives of children and adolescents other than their own.

St. Paul's youth pastor is also a stakeholder. He has been ministering to youth at St. Paul for nearly twenty-five years, the last thirteen of which have been in a full-time capacity. The youth pastor has credibility with most in the congregation, many who know first-hand of his work, often with their own children and adolescents. He also has credibility with many students in the community, who know the youth pastor and readily approach him on their school campuses and in the community.

Identifying and Describing the Needed Adaptive Changes among Stakeholders

In their book, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership*, Lee Bolman and Terrence Deal contend that there are "frames" from which people operate in navigating a particular life territory. People use these frames to solve problems and basically get things done. Bolman and Deal apprise,

> The structural frame focuses on the architecture of the organization—the design units and subunits, rules and roles, goals and policies—that shape and channel decisions and activities. The human resource frame emphasizes an understanding of people, with their strengths and foibles, reason and emotion, desires and fears. The political frame sees organizations as competitive arenas characterized by scarce resources, competing interests, and struggles for power and advantage. Finally, the symbolic frame focuses on issues of meaning and faith. It puts ritual, ceremony, story, play, and culture at the heart of organizational life.[11]

One might think that the only operating frame of importance in a church would be the symbolic frame, but this is incorrect. Though the symbolic frame is characterized by those rudiments present in a religious setting, churches are comprised of people who have different histories, training, and life experiences. In *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters*, Scott Cormode asserts that because most people are more familiar with bureaucratic organizational strategy and practices, they tend to either forget or overlook the fact that the primary responsibility of a Christian leader is to "provide a Christian perspective, an interpretative framework for people who want to live faithful lives. . . . Christian leadership is fundamentally an act of theological interpretation. . . . So a Christian leader today leads by shaping the ways that God's

[11] Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 18-19.

people interpret everything going on in their world. . . . The best leaders give people the tools to think for themselves. And then those leaders point people on a path forged by those new ideas."[12] In order to lead people who operate in different frames in a new direction, the leader must understand the frames in which those stakeholders operate.

Purposing to facilitate adaptive change, the leader will also need to recognize and navigate the structural frames inherent in the system of the UMC polity.[13] Though the senior pastor is the defined leader of a United Methodist church, the youth pastor, as the steward for the youth ministry who is introducing and implementing a hermeneutic of adoption, will be the major change agent. As such, the youth pastor must communicate the changes required by each stakeholder from his viewpoint and then present the changes required to the senior pastor and congregation.

The senior pastor functions not only as the theological and spiritual leader of St. Paul, but in accordance with United Methodist polity is also the administrative head of the parish. This fact necessitates that the senior pastor function in the structural frame, even though the symbolic frame is more closely associated with theological, spiritual, and cultural arenas.[14] In reality, the senior pastor and other stakeholders operate in multiple frames, so each frame must be addressed.

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[12] Scott Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense: Christian Leaders as Spiritual Interpreters* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2006), x-xi.

[13] Because the youth pastor is subordinate to the senior pastor, the youth pastor must obtain buy-in from senior pastor. Once senior pastor buy-in is accomplished with the youth pastor responsible to facilitate the needed adaptive changes, both pastors will have responsibilities in helping other stakeholders reframe as necessary to achieve the adaptive change required in order to establish a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry at St. Paul.

[14] Scott Cormode, "Overview of Leadership" (a handout provided during the course, "Youth, Family, and Culture," Fuller Theological Seminary, November 1, 2011). This lecture incorporated concepts

Typically, a "structural frame" leader inspires actions of others by making decisions, planning, delegating responsibilities and tasks, and creating committees to accomplish work. While the "business of ministry" is ministry rather than business, United Methodist senior pastors are well served in some instances by taking an ecclesiologistic view of the congregation as an organization. If the senior pastor embraces the youth pastor's concept of a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry at St. Paul, the senior pastor has an immediate designee in the youth pastor to facilitate the change. A challenge noted by Bolman and Deal in such an arrangement can be rigidity versus flexibility in facilitation and administration of the adaptive changes required for this paradigm shift. They write, "The structural dance between rigidity and flexibility is ongoing. The trick is achieving a balance between autonomy and inconsistency."[15] A positive working relationship between the senior pastor and the youth pastor is crucial, as is their understanding of each other's roles in facilitating this recommended change in youth ministry. The clarity of direction for the stakeholders will also be essential in keeping the stakeholders from becoming confused or demotivated as they come to grips with the adaptive work to be done.

Even though congregants who serve in the church perform voluntarily, United Methodist congregants are accustomed to functioning much as employees in a business in the sense that the arrangement of ministries is typically through teams or committees with lead persons for each. One could say the ecclesiology of the UMC views the congregation as an organization of sorts. Congregants see a hierarchical relationship

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from Bolman and Deal, Heifetz, and Branson. Cormode suggests that this grouping of arenas is typically within the symbolic frame.

[15] Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 47.

from lay persons to committee or team leaders to the pastor, and there is an authority chain in the reverse direction. Additionally, if the stakeholders recognize their leaders as legitimate in their ability to lead, the stakeholders will be more receptive to adaptive changes proposed by their leader.[16] If the St. Paul stakeholders grant the pastor and youth pastor legitimacy as their leaders, this can work in favor of those introducing the change because the stakeholders understand this change as something the leaders believe best meets the needs of the organization. These are positive characteristics of a group working in the structural frame with respect to this change.

There are positive aspects of the work done by the youth ministry team at St. Paul operating in the structural frame. The youth ministry team has successfully modeled Christian community and has worked together among and with the youth, in many instances demonstrating for youth what it means to be available and flexible in order to serve in whatever capacity needed. The team has striven to implement a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry to nurture adolescents into lifelong discipleship. However, while they have received training in their roles as youth ministers, their training has only empowered them enough to be team members, not "adoptive ministers of youth" necessary in the adoptive youth ministry paradigm.[17]

Another challenge to the discipling effort and therefore the effectiveness of the youth ministry team has been fluidity of team members and commitment. Michael Cohen and James March, in their book, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, write, "Fluid

[16] For more on the concept of "legitimacy," see Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, especially pages 41-46.

[17] The enhancement needed to progress the youth ministry team from "team members" to "ministers of youth" to "adoptive ministers of youth" will require development of the team members over time, modeled primarily by the youth pastor.

participation [occurs when] the participants in the organization vary among themselves in the amount of time and effort they devote to the organization; individual participants vary from one time to another. As a result, standard theories of power and choice seem to be inadequate; and the boundaries of the organization appear to be uncertain and changing."[18] A noted strength in the youth ministry team at St. Paul is that there is a core of team members who have been present, committed, and open to change for some time.

For many years the majority of adult congregants of St. Paul have been supportive of youth. The adaptive change that is proposed will shift the thinking of St. Paul congregants from not merely being supportive of youth, but to being "adoptive" of adolescents. St. Paul adult congregants can be counted upon to help with activities for youth in many ways. When St. Paul congregants were called upon to respond to community youth getting in trouble with law enforcement officials by developing a skateboard ministry, no less than six persons volunteered immediately to help. Most of those congregants served as part of the skateboard ministry team for the next seven years, while additional church members volunteered to meet personnel needs as enhancements were made within the ministry.

Responses such as this have, over the years, led the youth pastor to describe St. Paul as a "teen-crazy church." However, naming St. Paul as such has hindered the church's ability to move deeper into a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry, giving the impression that there is little change needed. For instance, while some congregants have interacted well with adolescents as the congregants served in ministry efforts such

[18] Michael Cohen and James March, *Leadership and Ambiguity* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1974), 3. Fuller Theological Seminary Library e-book.

as the skateboard ministry, those congregants were not persuaded nor trained to move from "interacting with" to "investing in" adolescents in ways that model a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. Because "teen-crazy" was previously defined by the youth pastor as something less than an adoptive approach to youth ministry, most congregants have not felt the need to move out of that comfort zone into one where they first interact with, but then more fully invest in, those youth with whom they come into contact through these ministries. The youth pastor must reframe what is meant by a "teen-crazy church" for those who would minister among youth by moving congregants further into an adoptive symbolic frame for "church."

The movement to this adoption paradigm is also affected by the families of those adolescents who participate in St. Paul Youth Ministries. Recent research indicates that adolescents will most likely model the religious habits of their parents. Smith and Denton report, "Most teenagers and their parents may not realize it, but a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents."[19] Some of the families that worship at St. Paul are fully involved in discipling their children and adolescents, while other St. Paul parents operate in the structural frame of "letting the church disciple their children." Some do not choose to disciple their adolescents through involvement in the church community at all. Others are striving to disciple their children while trying to navigate rebellious resistance; such resistance comes from their children being influenced powerfully by a youth culture immersed in

[19] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 56. Smith and Denton cite no less than six references including a "larger review and analysis" of their own work to back up this statement. See page 317 of *Soul Searching* for a detailed list of sources.

media containing messages that counter discipleship.[20] These and other adolescents are resistant to adults' efforts to love them due to the culture of abandonment in which they have been raised.[21] Other parents are striving successfully to disciple their children by engaging with them at home and by encouraging their children and adolescents to become and remain disciples through actively participating in the life of the church.

Parents can fall into the structural frame all too easily with respect to child-rearing and especially in discipling their children. In many St. Paul families, both parents work due to the high cost of living in this area. Like many other families struggling to provide or because they are caught up in the cultural current to obtain more and more material goods, in light of the current economy and with the pressures placed upon them by contemporary culture, time has become a resource that parents decide how to "spend." These factors may cause parents to compartmentalize child-rearing from discipling their children. The structural frame interprets authority in terms of job descriptions. A parent operating in the structural frame might see the role of the parent to provide goods and educational opportunities, while interpreting the church as solely owning the role of discipling adolescents. This is wrong-minded. If the parents are not pursuing discipleship, it is more likely that their children will not pursue discipleship, no matter how fully a pastor, youth pastor, or youth minister models a Christian lifestyle in the limited time that individual spends with the youth. If parents are expected to take more responsibility for discipling their children, shown to be much more effective than

[20] See Mueller, *Youth Culture 101*, especially Chapter 6.

[21] See Clark, *Hurt 2.0*; Elkind, *The Hurried Child* and *Ties That Stress*; and Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager*.

"leaving it to the church," the church must reframe parents' responsibilities and team with those willing to adaptively change to meet this challenge.

The adaptive change needed to employ a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry at St. Paul will require everyone involved to function also in both the human relations and symbolic frames. Effectively assessing the multiple frames out of which stakeholders should work will enable St. Paul to adapt to and embrace the hermeneutic of adoption with fewer challenges than attempting to operate from any one frame. Bolman and Deal are helpful here:

> Each of the frames has its own view of reality. Some frames seem clear and straightforward, while others seem puzzling. But learning all four deepens your appreciation and understanding of organizations. Galileo discovered this when he devised the first telescope. Each lens he added contributed to a more accurate image of the heavens. Successful managers take advantage of the same truth. They reframe until they understand the situation at hand. They do this by using more than one frame, or perspective, to develop a diagnosis of what they are up against and strategies for moving forward."[22]

The youth pastor will need to act as the manager of the adaptive change and will be best served by continuing to assess the frames from which the stakeholders are functioning. He must move the stakeholders from the structural frame to the symbolic frame in order to persuade the church to embrace a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry so that it is more likely that youth in the church's care will become lifelong disciples of Christ.

Human Relations Frame Changes

Bolman and Deal assert, "The human relations frame, based particularly on ideas from psychology, sees an organization as much like an extended family, made up of

[22] Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 15.

individuals with needs, feelings, prejudices, skills, and limitations. People have a great capacity to learn and often an even greater capacity to defend old attitudes and beliefs."[23] The main challenge for leaders who wish to lead persons in an organization who typically operate in the human relations frame through adaptive change is to find ways for those workers to feel good about the ways in which they accomplish the goal. Those who operate in the human relations frame feel good about what they are doing when the organization to which they give their efforts "serve human needs rather than the reverse."[24] For those operating in the human relations frame, building relationships is a part of their job satisfaction and is a central precept of the work effort.

Two of the key tenets of a church operating in the human relations frame are diametrically opposed to one another and can severely limit, if not prevent, adaptive change in regard to St. Paul's efforts to operate from an hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. On one hand, St. Paul has long operated under the terminology "the church family." Many of St. Paul's congregants and ministry groups see themselves as a type of family. Even though the majority of stakeholders have not yet been mentored into a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry, some go to great lengths to practice aspects of such discipleship in how they live their faith among one another, especially with other biological families with whom they are in close community. On the other hand, as Bolman and Deal point out, the people within organizations have a great capacity to defend long-standing attitudes, values, and beliefs and are therefore resistant to change. Compounding that particular challenge is the fact that the youth pastor has in

[23] Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 14.

[24] Ibid., 115.

the past referred to the church as "teen-crazy" in terms of their support of the youth, without realizing the further significant growth toward adoptive youth ministry that is necessary. This fact will make it somewhat challenging to convince the remaining stakeholders that the adaptive change into adoptive youth ministry is required.

Because the hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry exhibits both similarities and differences between adoption in a biblical sense and a secular one, confusion may arise regarding this concept. While the hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry does not involve physically separating children and adolescents from parents or legal guardians, it does entail the church taking responsibility for discipling children for a lifetime of trusting Jesus in all aspects and to encourage and empower parents of youth to team with the church in taking responsibility to disciple their young.

This idea of adoptive youth ministry at St. Paul was already in the research stage when the senior pastor was appointed to the parish. The youth pastor, working on his Doctorate of Ministry degree, has kept the senior pastor constantly updated on research done, discoveries made, and the resulting new direction of adoption as the hermeneutic of youth ministry within which the youth pastor intends to direct St. Paul. The senior pastor is wary of using the term "adoption" for this initiative. He describes the term as being "aggressive" to the point of "off-putting" for the stakeholders.[25] The senior pastor is

[25] A conversation about this work revealed an aspect of the term "adoption" that was difficult for the senior pastor to accept, and which might be helpful to others trying to facilitate the adaptive change of moving to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. The senior pastor attributed a meaning that led one to imagine "the church family" taking responsibility for the adolescent away from his or her biological family or legal guardians. This is a significant point, in as much as youth ministers must be aware primary caregivers, whether parents or legal guardians, may recoil at the thought of sharing spiritual formation of their children or those in their care. There may be instances where non-churched or spiritually immature primary caregivers, parents or legal guardians oppose the church discipling their children. Parents are to partner with God's people in inviting and adopting the young into the local and historic family of God. One can make a theological case for youth ministers supporting an adolescent whose decision to trust Jesus

supportive of the concept behind the term. He exhibits a theology of the church as a close-knit community, worshipping and serving God together as a people charged to "go" and make disciples of Jesus. The senior pastor has worked very hard to elicit, establish, and promote a common vision and mission of the church since his arrival. He has espoused his belief in Christianity as a strong relationship between God and people and among church family members who encourage one another to become thankful, caring, active disciples. These are all human relations frame viewpoints that should well serve the adaptive change to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry at St. Paul.

The St. Paul youth ministry team is slowly becoming more educated about, open to, and reflective of persons who embrace an adoptive approach to youth ministry. The youth pastor has been mentoring the team regarding aspects of what a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry looks like. He has recently consulted with the existing team and recruited several new youth ministers whose relational manner with youth reflects such a hermeneutic. The youth pastor also recently teamed with several youth ministers to provide a seminar on mentoring youth for the expressed purpose of ensuring those youth ministers realized the impact of their adoptive youth ministry actions in the lives of those whom they "adopted," and to model to those youth ministers positive aspects of the

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as Lord of her or his life even when such a decision causes family dissension. Scriptural support of a theology for youth ministry that places the church in a role of responsibility for discipling persons that is at least as significant to that of "family" includes Matthew 12:48. Here Jesus, when told that his mother and brothers were waiting to speak with him, replies, "whoever does the will of my Father in Heaven is my brother, sister and mother." Donald A. Hagner goes so far as to say that in this instance, Jesus is proclaiming that following him and operating within God's kingdom takes precedence over earthly relationships including those between even the closest of family members. See Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew 1-13*, vol. 33A of *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1998), 359-360, Logos Bible Software 5. In John 8:34-47, Jesus points to his disciples as those who hear God's voice, obeys God and are therefore sons of the Father as opposed to those who are bound by sin, listening to Satan, and are outside of the family of God. See K.O. Gangel, *John*, vol. 4 of *Holman New Testament Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 165.

human relations frame utilized in ministry. Those who have been part of these initiatives and events have shown positive indications that they are adapting to the hermeneutic of adoption by becoming more open to and involved in the lives of some adolescents in their care. Others who would prefer to continue to operate in past modes and not move into a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry could experience the confusion and perceived unpredictability inherent in such a relationship shift more intensely and negatively. The youth pastor must prioritize orienting these team members into their new roles and provide guided, supportive opportunities to help these team members adjust to the essential new relationship model.

St. Paul has recently seen a number of newer adult congregants attending worship. Several have assertively become part of the serving body, some volunteering for ministry efforts after being specifically invited, while others have done so of their own initiative. Many have reflected an interest in relationship evidenced by their joining with others for fellowship, new church member and educational types of classes, and ministry efforts. Such congregants seeking relationship between themselves and God and between themselves and other congregants will be the first targeted population for the youth pastor to introduce to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry.

As the adaptive change to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry progresses, St. Paul parents may simultaneously be the most effective factor in and the biggest obstacle to implementing a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry at St. Paul. Some parents have shown no more discernible interest in discipling their children than to allow the church to do so. Others are currently in meaningful, close, adoptive

relationships with other parents and their children, and with the youth pastor in regard to discipling their children. The National Study on Youth and Religion states,

> Contrary to popular misguided cultural stereotypes and frequent parental misconceptions, we believe that the evidence clearly shows that the single most important social influence on the religious and spiritual lives of adolescents is their parents. . . . The best social predictor, although not a guarantee, of what the religious and spiritual lives of youth will look like is what the religious and spiritual lives of their parents do look like.[26]

With this in mind, the youth pastor will need to work within the human relations frame in strengthening relationships with and among the parents of St. Paul youth. The youth pastor can capitalize on the trust he has built with the majority of parents of St. Paul youth. This trust has been revealed frequently through conversations parents have with the youth pastor regarding the spiritual development of their children. The relationship which now exists is a good foundation from which the youth pastor can move parents of St. Paul youth into a learning organization type of environment,[27] which is necessary for stakeholders to embrace a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry.

Symbolic Frame Changes

Though there are aspects of the structural and human relations frames which can be utilized to enhance the adaptive change needed to move St. Paul to operate from a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry, true adaptive change happens in the symbolic frame. Also recognized as the theological, spiritual, or cultural frame, the symbolic frame touches on how people derive meaning. Bolman and Deal explain, "The

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[26] Smith and Denton, *Soul Searching*, 261.

[27] A "learning organization" utilizes "double-loop learning." In such learning, those in the organization ask questions not only about objective facts but also about the reasons and motives behind those facts. See Chris Argyris, "Good Communication That Blocks Learning," *Harvard Business Review* 72, issue 4 (July/August 1994): 77.

symbolic frame seeks to interpret and illuminate basic issues of meaning and belief that make symbols so powerful. It depicts a world far different from traditional canons of rationality, certainty, and linearity. . . . Symbols embody and express an organization's culture: the interwoven pattern of beliefs, values, practices, and artifacts that defines for members who they are and how they are to do things."[28] Meaning is formulated from the symbolic frame.

In order to move people to a new story or new reality via adaptive change, those persons must be able to envision that new story or new reality into which they can move. People cannot be coerced into adaptive change. People will instead give a leader in whom they trust authorization to persuade them and lead them into a new reality. In adaptive change, the authority to lead is crucial. Typically authority is given to someone in whom hope is placed to either solve problems or provide the solution. This occurs when people are working in the structural frame and are dealing with technical problems. However, when people give authority for someone to lead them into and through adaptive change, the leader will not be providing the solution, but leading the "followers" to discover and implement the solution or multiple solutions. Leaders granted this type of authority operate in the symbolic frame; they redefine meaning for the organization and lead the organization into and ultimately through unknown, risky, and disorienting territory.[29]

Even though St. Paul parishioners may trust the youth pastor, they may still resist change because adaptive change creates loss of meaning of symbols and practices

[28] Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 242-243.

[29] For an in-depth explanation of authority, leadership, and how they are related and interrelated in adaptive change processes, see Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 23-31.

previously held in esteem. Stakeholders could feel grief because some values and practices held dear may need to be left behind. To counter this feeling of loss, the youth pastor will need to hold up core values and meanings that will remain through the change. For instance, the youth pastor will need to communicate that St. Paul's Youth Ministry will continue to be Christo-centric and strive to build familial relations while assertively partnering with families to disciple their children. Though discipleship strategy and the structure of relationships might change for the better, both will remain core values of the youth ministry. The youth pastor will also need to come alongside those experiencing the grief of loss resulting from the adaptive change process, leading them through that grief.[30]

New meanings and new roles may also create fear of ineffectiveness on the part of those being asked to fill the new roles. Both the youth pastor and the senior pastor will need to be aware of this potential for loss of legitimacy and authority because old roles and practices which had been taken for granted or cherished are being questioned as part of the adaptive change process. This may also be true for the youth ministers as they are asked to perform in different frames, do new and less well-defined tasks, and become the initial "adopters of youth" in order to implement and be the examples for the adaptive change. Congregants and parents may experience the change in negative ways due to being asked to fill new roles and adjust relationships with their children and ministers.

[30] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 23-31. For leading through grief, see pages 22-23 and 96-97.

Change Techniques to Be Employed

Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky caution,

> Adaptive challenges are difficult because their solutions require people to change their ways. Unlike known or routine problem solving for which past ways of thinking, relating, and operating are sufficient for achieving good outcomes, adaptive work demands three very tough human tasks: figuring out what to conserve from past practices, figuring out what to discard from past practices, and inventing new ways that build from the best of the past.[31]

St. Paul must conserve and build on the yearning of those who wish to disciple their youth for life, accept there are ineffective patterns and habits from past approaches to youth ministry to accomplish such discipleship, and make changes necessary to live a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry.

Ecclesiological bases for St. Paul to employ a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry can be found in the vows to which United Methodist churches commit upon baptizing children and receiving church members. The church body vows to "nurture" those whom God is claiming into lifelong discipleship. In receiving baptisans, whether as infants, adolescents, or adults who are claiming faith in Jesus the Christ as Lord of their lives, church members also respond to a charge to "do all in [their] power to increase their faith, confirm their hope, and perfect them in love."[32] These vows, when enacted sincerely, enlist the congregation to move beyond simply taking an interest in the young to becoming significantly invested in their lives, effectively "adopting" adolescents into the family of God represented by the local church. The youth pastor must reframe and redefine what it means to invest in young people's lives to the adult

[31] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 69.

[32] For UMC vows for baptism, confirmation, and the receiving of new members, see General Board of Discipleship, *United Methodist Hymnal*, 34-35.

stakeholders in this adaptive change through specific examples, exemplary living, and proclamation that reflect "adoption" to those stakeholders. Through these mechanisms, the youth pastor will help the congregation envision, embrace, and live into a new reality of what it means to be a "teen-crazy church."

This new reality will manifest in congregants taking the initiative to get to know the youth as individuals and as "family members." Adults will need to spend the time and effort it takes to embrace adolescents, and invest in them by involving the young in their own lives and in the life of the larger church in meaningful ways. Adults will need to "adopt" the young by opening up to them as members of their new family such that adolescents will grow together with other congregants as lifelong disciples of Christ. The church body will be led to counter the abandonment felt by contemporary adolescents by linking with adolescents in ways that both parties have opportunities to share their faith journeys with one another.[33]

The church will be reminded and mentored to follow the biblical model is has been given of God adopting his people into a new community. Through example and exhortation, the youth pastor will charge church members to enact the membership vows all members have taken by blessing the young with the love and wisdom available in intergenerational approaches to ministry to, with, for, and through youth and adults

[33] Reggie Joiner advises youth ministries to actively and deliberately encourage and create opportunities for families to elicit trusted adults outside of the immediate family as discipling mentors to their children. See Reggie Joiner, *The Slow Fade* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2010), 55 and *Think Orange*, 73. Both Chap Clark and Jeff Baxter encourage youth ministries to attempt to invert the longstanding approach of having one adult to every five youth to facilitate adult-to-adolescent relationships in youth ministries. Powell, Clark, and Baxter advocate that youth ministries should instead strive to link each adolescent with five trusted, caring adults who will invest themselves into young persons' "spiritual, emotional, social, and intellectual" development in small, moderate, and big ways. See Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 101 and Baxter, *Together*, 157.

journeying in faith together. Adults will be charged to seek out and take every opportunity to include youth in all facets of the church, not segregating adolescents into age-dependent silos. The youth pastor has enlisted a diverse, intergenerational core of adults to begin the ministering under a hermeneutic of adoption strategy for youth ministry while also advocating for youth to be more fully embraced by the entire faith community. This action will bless the church by deliberately revealing to other adults the benefits of accepting adolescents with all of their passion, immediacy, and urgency. Opportunities to place adolescents in physical proximity to more adults will be employed by the youth pastor. These will be adaptive changes for many at St. Paul.

Beliefs and values of the stakeholders with respect to youth ministry will need to be reframed. It is the youth pastor's belief that nurturing of St. Paul youth has not been effective enough in discipling them in a manner that makes it most likely that more of the youth will become lifelong disciples. Too many youth have left St. Paul upon graduation from high school and no longer show evidence of living in a vibrant, meaningful relationship with Jesus as their savior through active participation in the life of the church, if in fact such a relationship ever really took hold in the first place. St. Paul's Youth Ministry has not been as effective as possible in teaming with parents to disciple their children. Part, if not all, of the reason for this is that the youth pastor has only just begun to understand and communicate the concept of a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry to St. Paul stakeholders.

A "holding environment" will need to be created to persuade stakeholders that change is needed and to move them into adaptive change actions. A holding environment is a created situation for stakeholders where the environment is uncomfortable enough

that stakeholders will not be able to remain in the situation, but is safe enough that stakeholders can experiment with a new way of being.[34] A holding environment has been partially formed through the aforementioned recruitment of a more diverse youth ministry team. Some of those recruited have come out of their normal comfort zone to respond to God's call to disciple youth. The youth pastor will need to ensure that disciplined attention to the change and the new process is maintained to prevent returning to status quo.[35] This has also been partially accomplished by constant support and encouragement of those now discipling youth while not allowing them to revert to former roles. Dealing with the anticipated grief of losses perceived as the church moves into a new approach to youth ministry will also be crucial for movement toward this new reality. Parents of adolescents in the church might be reasonably leery of other adults "adopting" their children, even if that adoption is a metaphor for welcoming and nurturing those adolescents toward becoming disciples of Christ who are responsible, caring, Christian adults. Youth workers unconvinced that a new approach to youth ministry is warranted might fear that youth will not be effectively ministered to in the new format. They may also fear failure to adapt to the change as well as the loss of authority and their own irrelevance that may result. The youth pastor must consistently encourage and assist those exhibiting such reactions to the adaptive change, and enlist others who are adapting well to assist in this process.

The church will need to become a learning organization. The youth pastor will need to continue to educate the senior pastor regarding what is meant by a hermeneutic of

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[34] Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, 139-142.

[35] Ibid.

adoption for youth ministry. This holds for all stakeholders, however if the senior pastor does not continue to embrace the change, it may be impossible to facilitate throughout the church. On the part of all stakeholders, old views of youth ministry and the resulting patterns of behavior that would preclude moving into adoptive youth ministry will need to be discarded. This will require what Chris Argyris calls "double-loop learning" in his article, "Good Communication That Blocks Learning."[36] Argyris explains that in a learning organization,

> learning occurs in two forms, single-loop and double-loop. Single-loop learning asks a one-dimensional question to elicit a one-dimensional answer. My favorite example is a thermostat, which measures ambient temperature against a standard setting and turns the heat source on or off accordingly. The whole transaction is binary. Double-loop learning takes an additional step or, more often than not, several additional steps. It turns the question back on the questioner. It asks what the media call "follow-up questions." In the case of the thermostat, for instance, double-loop learning would include wondering whether the current setting was actually the most effective temperature at which to keep the room and, if so, whether the present heat source was the most effective means of achieving it. A double-loop process might also ask why the current setting was chosen in the first place. In other words, double-loop learning asks questions not only about objective facts but also about the reasons and motives behind those facts.[37]

Argyris goes on to explain that the workers who do not engage in double-loop thinking typically operate from positive motives. Sometimes they do not want to "rock the boat" or "open Pandora's Box" to other problems. Perhaps they believe they are showing loyalty to the leader by not asking hard questions. However, when only single-loop learning and questioning are taking place, the deeper issues are never dealt with and adaptive change is never accomplished.

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[36] Argyris, "Good Communication That Blocks Learning," 77.

[37] Ibid.

The significance of double-loop learning applies to the congregants of St. Paul. Even though the youth pastor consistently encourages that a more adoptive, relational approach to youth ministry is needed in order to disciple the youth for life, and examples have been provided and shown regarding how to proceed, too many in the congregation continue to engage with the youth only on surface levels. The youth pastor must continue to work to discover why this continues and keep moving the congregation through the adaptive change from considering themselves "interested bystanders" to "ministers of youth" to "adoptive ministers of youth."

Another facet of moving to a learning organization is for the youth pastor to embrace a new leadership role. Peter Senge, in his article, "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations," defines the role an adaptive change leader must assume:

> In learning organizations, the leaders' roles differ dramatically from that of the charismatic decision maker. Leaders are designers, teachers, and stewards. These roles require new skills: the ability to build shared vision, to bring to the surface and challenge prevailing mental models, and to foster more systemic patterns of thinking. Leadership in a learning organization starts with the principle of creative tension. Creative tension comes from seeing clearly where we want to be, our "vision," and telling the truth about where we are now, our "current reality." The gap between the two creates a natural tension. Creative tension can be resolved in two basic ways: by raising current reality toward the vision or by lowering the vision toward current reality. Individuals, groups, and organizations who learn how to work with creative tension learn how to use the energy it generates to move reality more reliably toward their vision. With creative tension, the energy to change comes from the vision, from what we want to create, juxtaposed with current reality. [38]

This is a leadership role which the youth pastor must work hard to live into.

[38] Peter M. Senge, "The Leader's New Work: Building Learning Organizations," *Sloan Management Review* 32, issue 1 (Fall 1990): 9.

In St. Paul's case, the youth pastor will need to continue to lead the church into recognizing that the current reality is, in too many cases, adults "involved with" rather than "invested in" youth. St. Paul has a core of congregants open to embracing and implementing a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. These individuals are capable of working in the tension of having not yet attained the vision of having five caring adults invested in each adolescent. This fact will be a building block in turning current reality into envisioned future. The congregants of St. Paul have the capability to reframe and redefine what they understand to be a "teen crazy church" and mature into a faith community that more fully nurtures adolescents toward being lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

CHAPTER 7

EVALUATION OF THE PROCESS

The concept of nurturing adolescents toward lifelong discipleship through a hermeneutic of adoption was first introduced to the youth pastor by Dr. Chap Clark in the fall of 2011.[1] In order for a church to enact a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry, it must understand the debilitating effects upon adolescents from systemic abandonment and realize that the local church can provide the response needed to counter the challenges to adolescent individuation that abandonment presents. Such a church responds by designing ministries and conducting those ministries in a manner that fosters adults journeying with adolescents, sharing their lives of faith as an accepting, nurturing presence that helps adolescents to navigate their journey to individuation. There are those within St. Paul who wish to see adolescents find robust, trusting, transforming relationships with Jesus Christ such that those adolescents live their discipleship through and within the Church throughout their lives. Whether lifelong discipling methods are present, robust, and continuous within the people and ministries of St. Paul must be

[1] Clark, "Strategic Adoption."

continuously assessed. In order to progress, families and congregants must be led to internalize adoptive youth ministry practices that have yet to be embraced and enacted.

There are two major areas of concentration in order to fulfill an adoptive approach to youth ministry. The first is to nurture discipleship of adolescents within the whole church, which includes promoting intergenerational relationships. The second is to team with families to disciple their adolescents. These are actions that will help to keep St. Paul focused on nurturing adolescents in ways that lead them toward lifelong discipleship.

The theology of Galatians 5, honoring United Methodist baptismal and confirmation vows and believing in the promises of Jesus in John 15, can provide foundational revelations to foster congregants' passion to accept their part in a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. As congregants love adolescents as family members in an adoptive approach to youth ministry, they are "actively waiting" for the righteousness that God's Holy Spirit brings (Galatians 5:5-6). Such active waiting is inherent in the church honoring its baptismal and confirmation vows to nurture the young as lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.[2] Jesus' intent for abundant life and complete joy for those who obey him (John 10:10 and John 15:11, respectively) can be interpreted to be for both the discipler and for those being discipled when these persons are joined together under the hermeneutic of adoption.

The youth pastor has taken steps to lead the St. Paul faith community into his interpretation of the hermeneutic of adoption. Some congregants have actively responded to this effort. Steps taken include mentoring the youth ministry team in adoption

[2] See General Board of Discipleship, *United Methodist Hymnal*, 33-39.

methodology and educating the entire congregation in the same. The youth pastor has taken every opportunity afforded him to present sermons describing the hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry and explaining its significance to the congregation. Informal conversations with ministry team leaders and individual parishioners have also been utilized by the youth pastor to move the congregation into an adoptive approach to youth ministry. Both of these strategies have included the precept that every congregant is a youth minister. This concept has been made more palatable to the congregation through the use of isomorphism[3] with respect to discipling youth. Specific congregants who have exhibited gifts for ministry with adolescents have been recruited to join the youth ministry team. Several have responded and are putting forth laudable effort. Opportunities for new and veteran youth ministry team members to begin nurturing relationships with adolescents have been created.

St. Paul Youth Ministries has for many years nurtured adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. Through mentoring relationships, mentors have helped young people to trust Jesus by placing them in positions of serving God through passionately worshipping and serving God while also serving others. St. Paul adolescents continue to be linked with adults who walk with them as these adolescents embark on such service opportunities. The youth pastor continues to forge working relationships with the senior pastor and ministry leaders with the expressed purpose of watching for, creating and

[3] "Isomorphism" is a way legitimacy is obtained for a concept by being put in terms of an idea that already is legitimate in the minds of the stakeholders. In this case, an adoptive hermeneutic for youth ministry has been shown to be analogous to discipling youth, and discipleship of youth is what the congregation promises in their baptismal and confirmation vows. The new reality is that with this new knowledge of "adoptive youth ministry," the church has not been robust enough in the past with respect to how they have discipled adolescents. A current phrase in "street lingo" that some might understand is that the church must now "step up its game" with respect to discipling adolescents if it hopes to disciple them for life. See Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, 45.

fostering "positions" for adolescents. These positions are believed to align with adolescents' unique gifts and developmental levels and are expected to be mutually fulfilling to each unique adolescent and the larger congregation. Potential adult mentors and disciplers are constantly being evaluated and recruited to walk with adolescents on their journeys to individuation.[4]

Within the youth ministry arm of St. Paul, efforts to strengthen nuclear family relationships, help families to more effectively disciple their adolescents, and foster intergenerational church family relationships have been recent foci.[5] A goal of St. Paul Youth Ministries in these efforts is to move steadily toward having a five-to-one ratio of interested-to-invested adults for every adolescent. This is a particularly challenging adaptive change for this faith community.

Success Stories

Members of the youth ministry team have responded positively both to being educated in the hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry and to mentoring they have received. Nearly to a person, team members have reflected mentoring efforts in meaningful ways. For instance, one of the youth ministry team also teaches a children's Sunday school class. Each Sunday morning however, before going to her classroom, she comes into the high school classroom and warmly greets each student. Students return

[4] The youth pastor has consistently repeated to the youth ministry team and the congregation at large that the hoped for adult-to-adolescent relationship ratio is 5-to-1. The context for this ratio is that five adults would be trusted by each adolescent, some for minor but meaningful interaction, and some to help the adolescent navigate what she or he considers larger life issues. This ratio is the goal of St. Paul Youth Ministries. See Powell and Clark, *Sticky Faith*, 101 and Baxter, *Together*, 157.

[5] The term "recent" means since the year 2011 when the youth pastor was exposed to the concept of a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry by Dr. Chap Clark. See Clark, "Strategic Adoption."

the act, as they can be observed approaching this teacher freely, some confiding in her for advice at Sunday evening youth gatherings which afford them time to speak longer with this teacher. Three adults who have joined the youth ministry team, one of whom is a parent of two students, have quickly formed relationships with several adolescents who seek these advisors out consistently. Another has embraced the adoptive methodology strongly, and has also become a high school Sunday school teacher in addition to volunteering in the Sunday evening youth ministry. All attend student activities outside of the church and have begun relationships with adolescents that show potential to be discipling relationships.

Additional congregants, recruited by the youth pastor because they exhibited gifts for adoptive youth ministry and had significant teaching experience in Christian curriculum, are now co-teaching high school and middle school Sunday school classes. Although United Methodist "Safe Sanctuaries" policy requires only two adults be present in such classes, these classes have as many as six teachers on any given Sunday. The youth pastor and teachers have spoken openly with the adolescent students about the fact that the adults' presence reflects their availability as those who wish to share their journeys of faith with the students. One day while reading Scripture, a student looked up from his Bible abruptly and exclaimed, "Look at all these adults in here!" One of the teachers responded, "We told you we love you guys!" A smile came across the student's face and he resumed reading. Nearly a year later, trusting adolescent-adult relationships in that class that might have seemed unlikely are now evident.

Some ministry teams within the church body have taken steps to embrace a hermeneutic of adoption. Several adolescents have been mentored in developing

construction skills by being recruited to join the church trustees. These positions had been previously looked upon as "working positions for adults" rather than a place where intergenerational relationships could be built. The leaders of the church mission and outreach team recently acted upon a particular midadolescent's interest in local mission work. Rather than adults coordinating the event, this youth, named Sarah, was recruited and mentored by mission team members to lead coordination of a fundraiser event for the poor.[6] Mission team members worked side by side with Sarah to advise her on the steps inherent in and the skills needed to accomplish this task. At least one of these ministry team leaders has continued to foster a relationship with Sarah.

Some particularly encouraging indicators that St. Paul is embracing a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry have come from young adults who are pouring themselves into the lives of adolescents. In one case a young adult and his late-adolescent brother formed a mentoring relationship with a midadolescent student, named John, who was exhibiting troubling behaviors.[7] The brothers' parents welcomed John into their home often, allowing and encouraging their sons to strengthen their mentoring relationship with John, and gaining John's trust as a result of their compassionate actions. This family, and in particular the two brothers, were living out the concept of "church outside of the walls." By doing so, they were able to reach John, a midadolescent whom the church would not have reached by ordinary means.

Upon returning from a two-year period of mission work abroad, another young adult, named Annie, spoke with the youth pastor about the fact that she felt called by God

[6] For the sake of privacy, "Sarah" has been used in place of the youth's real name.

[7] For the sake of privacy, "John" has been used in place of the youth's real name.

to do small group ministry with adolescents. Annie, with approval from the youth pastor, recruited other young adults and her parents to assist in the ministry because she knew her parents would be a welcoming, supportive, "adoptive" presence for adolescents who might come.[8] From her initiative, St. Paul Youth Ministry's "Senior High Life Group" was conceived. Each week, high school students flock to Annie's home where she and her parents and siblings exhibit unconditional acceptance toward each adolescent who crosses their threshold. These particular weekly gatherings strongly reflect the Galatians 5 theology of waiting in faith upon God's Holy Spirit for the righteousness that God's presence in one's life brings. There is no agenda other than for this portion of the body to enjoy God's love and their love of one another. Annie's family is another that attends many of these adolescents' extracurricular school and community activities. These are examples of intergenerational "adoptive" youth ministry being facilitated by families in large measure beyond the walls of the St. Paul campus.

There also exist several examples of "youth adopting youth," some as a result of being introduced and mentored into the hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. Other examples are due to God's direct gifting of those involved to love their peers in an adoptive manner. Several generations of high school students from St. Paul have served as student facilitators of "Best Buddies"[9] at the local high school. St. Paul Youth Ministries formed a young adult fellowship club for those special needs students when they graduated so that they would continue to have a Christ-centered social gathering

[8] For the sake of privacy, "Annie" has been used in place of the youth's real name.

[9] "Best Buddies" is a program within the public school system whereby students with special needs are linked to a student mentor. Student mentors of Best Buddies not only help them to navigate their school experience, but they also mentor them outside of school hours and off campus.

opportunity, once again recruiting new ministers from St. Paul and other congregations to facilitate the group. In another instance, when an elementary school student lost his father suddenly, several high school students in St. Paul youth ministry formed an adoptive relationship with the student that included interacting with him on the church campus, providing child care for he and a younger sibling, and doing activities with him outside of school hours. After being part of this initiative, some students in the middle school and high school Sunday school classes were moved to volunteer to assist adult teachers in the younger children's classes. In another case of adoptive love, several local high school football team members for whom the youth pastor is serving as team chaplain responded to the youth pastor's request that they act to support a peer student who is active in St. Paul youth ministry and who is battling significant self-esteem issues.

Several other encouraging examples of intergenerational ministry are occurring as well. No less than six adults responded to the youth pastor's plea for assistance in order for the church to establish a "skateboard ministry" for adolescents who had been cited by police for skating in public parking lots. Along with these initial adults, several youth also helped to staff the weekly ministry that reached nearly exclusively to non-churched adolescents. As the ministry added facets, some to support the families of the skateboarders, the additional volunteers were, to a person, senior citizens.

In another arena, the youth pastor elicited the music director to include late-adolescents in the church praise band. One late-adolescent has been mentored over many years by band members. He has become one of the band's best and most committed participants, continuing in a mentoring relationship with the band members.

In another example of building intergenerational ministry, youth mission trips are now attended by several adults. It used to be that these trips would only include enough adults to barely maintain safety. Now the ratio of adults-to-adolescents is consistently one-to-one. One adult in particular has become a trusted friend to several adolescents. This father of two adolescent boys spoke to the entire congregation about how the relationships he formed had moved him to now utilize the annual mission trip as means of building relationship with his sons.

The drama ministry is possibly the most robust intergenerational ministry at St. Paul. The drama ministry team director has written plays and skits that have included entire families. This minister has mentored youth as young as preschool age in the script-writing process as well as in lead roles in worship skits.

The youth pastor has taken other direct actions to advance the adoptive approach to youth ministry at St. Paul. The intent of these measures is to strengthen families by helping parents be effective disciplers to their adolescents. At the encouragement of the youth pastor, some parents now attend confirmation classes as both helpers and observers in an attempt to assist other parents in discipling their children. Parent meetings are conducted with the expressed purpose of informing parents regarding adolescent development challenges and equipping the parents regarding how they might respond. Open discussions about what families are facing with respect to adolescent development and youth culture are part of these meetings.

Events designed to include entire families are now a regular part of the youth ministry schedule. Parents and guardians of St. Paul youth receive a weekly newsletter from the youth pastor that covers these same areas and also informs them of potential

"family friendly" events they may consider attending. The youth pastor assertively looks for opportunities to help other ministry leaders design their events to promote more deliberate intergenerational and family interaction. For instance, the youth pastor teamed with the Family Ministries team leader to design the annual Advent Craft Workshop. During this event, those who wish to help with the effort will be able to do so while also participating with their families, rather than isolating adolescents from their families. The youth pastor garnered buy-in from youth and designed the Christmas Nursing Home Worship Service, typically led by adults, to be led by youth and to include intergenerational family participation in conducting the service. As families of St. Paul adolescents have been directly involved in some of these measures and others have observed the youth pastor, church leaders, and congregants becoming more invested in the lives of adolescents, parents have contacted the youth pastor more frequently, sometimes with very sensitive information, to ask advice or assistance with their adolescent children.

Continuing Challenges

If one considers a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry from a Wesleyan perspective, recognizing that the process is part of the sanctification of a community of faith, then the idea that there will be continuing challenges is not discouraging. The fact is that there are continuing challenges to be overcome. There will likely continue to be more challenges as the church transitions more fully into adoptive youth ministry.

A challenge only partly overcome to date is defining the concept. There are likely parishioners who have either not heard of this new approach to youth ministry or have

heard of it and have not embraced it. For those who have heard of the adoptive approach, some have found the terms "abandonment" and "adoption" to be more aggressive than is palatable. The youth pastor and those stakeholders who have bought into nurturing adolescents for lifelong discipleship through a hermeneutic of adoption will need to keep exemplifying and communicating what is meant by this concept. The youth pastor has substituted less off-putting terms for some of Clark's terms—such as "forgotten" or "overlooked" in place of "abandonment," and "investment" in place of "adoption." These minor changes have been made in order to continue the conversation and elicit support for adoptive youth ministry from those who have questioned the idea that adults have systemically abandoned American adolescents for decades.[10]

Overcoming the fear of loss that adaptive change brings will be a continuing challenge.[11] It is the tendency of people to resist change as fear of loss sets in. The youth pastor must listen closely to cases of resistance and continue to use an isomorphic strategy to define the new reality in terms of past successes.[12]

Maintaining disciplined attention[13] to the measures put in place to date and continuing the transition into adoptive youth ministry will be ongoing challenges. People revert to old understandings and habits that are more comfortable than doing the hard work of adaptive change. Communicating change to all of a faith community, let alone

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[10] See Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, x-xi and 63-66, for a discussion of the importance of spiritual leaders providing a Christian perspective and interpretive framework for congregants to live faithful lives. Cormode believes that "the purpose of Christian leadership is to make spiritual meaning."

[11] Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky, *The Practice of Adaptive Leadership*, 96-97, 141, and 265-266.

[12] Cormode, *Making Spiritual Sense*, 45.

[13] Heifetz, *Leadership without Easy Answers*, 139-142.

convincing them of the need for adaptive change, will also present noteworthy challenges.

Continuing Improvement Actions

The work to lead St. Paul into the adaptive change of embracing a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry is not complete. One could argue from a Wesleyan perspective that this work will continue within the church as part of God's sanctification of this faith community. Continuing challenges are expected. However God has led the youth pastor and the church through many of those challenges already, and he has preserved within them the spirit to continue. The youth pastor needs to formally address entire ministry teams with content of informal conversations he has held individually with parishioners and ministry team leaders. Entire ministry teams should be encouraged and exhorted, and then mentored into the hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. The necessity of moving all parishioners into a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry in order to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship must continue to be preached and lived before the full faith community by those who have already bought into the concept.

One such instance occurred at the close of a recent St. Paul church council meeting.[14] An adult council member said, "I'd like to see more of our youth involved in our ministries." After reminding the group of the significant numbers of youth and young adults who are actively involved in meaningful ways in many of the ministries of St. Paul, several in leadership positions, the youth pastor offered a new reality. He asked,

[14] This meeting was attended by the author of this paper (also the youth pastor of St. Paul). It took place on April 3, 2013.

> How many of you in this room stop a teenager each week and ask them about their lives? How many of you take the time to make that very small investment in them? What would our church look like if every adult identified five, three, or even just one youth in whose lives you could invest yourselves even to that small extent? What would it feel like for a young person who is used to traveling these halls and being greeted only by the youth ministry team to have another caring adult inquire into their life? We cannot expect our youth to want to be involved in a 'church family' who does not know them. I know this brings you out of your comfort zone, but I see the faces in this room and I know you are capable. And I know that is the kind of church you wish to build. Can you, will you pray about doing this?

There was stunned silence. The youth pastor pondered whether or not he would soon need to update his resume. However, after the meeting several participants approached the youth pastor, one encouraging him to carry this same message to the rest of our church. "And don't leave your passion for this behind when you do," the person stated. Another said, "You really convicted me. Please send me a list of names of this year's Confirmands so I can begin to meet them."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Youth attempting to navigate the sea of the adolescent journey do so by the process of individuation. Running deeply within the internals of the adolescent vessel are three major questions: "Who am I?" "Do I matter?" and "Where do I belong?" These are daunting questions for adolescents passing through what is arguably the most formative time in their lives, even with the help of caring adults. There are positive currents that guide adolescents toward healthy individuation and those currents that counter the adolescents' attempts to find identity, attain autonomy, and find belonging in order to reconnect with others as healthy young adults. Youth attempting to navigate the sea of the adolescent journey who feel they must navigate this time period alone can feel "tossed about" to the point of being "pulled under" by their task of individuation.

One of the most significant "countercurrents" running in the sea of the adolescent journey to which youth workers must respond is the current of systemic abandonment of the young. There are other "currents" that contribute to such abandonment, magnify systemic abandonment's effects, and counter healthy psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents. These countercurrents likely impede the efforts of the Church to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship. Examples of such countercurrents include the extension of the adolescent journey, which has led to the creation of "midadolescence," contemporary cultural influences on the young, shallowness in relationships, and even the religious practices of faith communities.

A theology for youth ministry based on a hermeneutic of adoption is the polar opposite of, and the Church's correct response to, the "countercurrent" of systemic

abandonment of contemporary American adolescents. The Church can assist adolescents in their journey to individuation as they struggle through identity, autonomy, and belonging in a more holistic fashion than do other institutions by interpreting its ministry to adolescents through the theological and practical lens of adoption. Churches that practice adoptive youth ministry can demonstrate a redemptive embrace of adolescents' psychosocial needs and their spiritual needs as well. Youth ministry based on a hermeneutic of adoption of the young can make it more likely that adolescents grow into lifelong discipleship.

A hermeneutic of adoption is needed to counter the abandonment adolescents feel and provides a biblical foundation for adolescent psychosocial and spiritual development. Through God's self-initiated covenant with Abram in Genesis 17, God promises to create the nation Israel, promising also to provide for and protect them as God's family. According to Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians 12:13, all of humankind are baptized into Christ's body, the Church, as if being "adopted" into God's family by the Holy Spirit. In John 15:16, Jesus told his disciples, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." An exegesis of Galatians 5 provides a theology of one's identity based on one's relationship with the Creator God that counters the current of worth based on performance, under which contemporary adolescents struggle. A hermeneutic of adoption is founded on a theology of discipleship that is based on eagerly waiting for the hope of God's righteousness through God's Holy Spirit by faith, internal transformation of the person by God's grace, and "faith expressing itself in love." This theology of discipleship counters the current of "performance-based" and "sin management" discipleship, and it can enhance the Church's ability to nurture adolescents toward lifelong discipleship.

Applying ecclesiological aspects from missional church and Wesleyan doctrine and praxis can be utilized by a church to embrace and enact an adoptive approach to youth ministry for the formation of lifelong disciples. A missional church accepts and reflects aspects of "adoption" of its youth in attempting to disciple their young for lifelong faithfulness within the community. Both missional churches and Wesleyan doctrine embrace seeking out, inviting, accepting, and discipling the "last, least and lost." Contemporary adolescents raised in a culture of abandonment fit that demographic. Exploring ecclesiological applications from the larger Church perspective and then relating those applications to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry will enhance a church's ability to disciple its youth for life.

Enacting a hermeneutic of adoption as the youth ministry model for nurturing lifelong discipleship requires a church to make adaptive changes. Stakeholders in the change process will either have to change or will have a legitimate claim on the changes to be made. Every person in the church is an important stakeholder when that church hopes to enact a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry as it seriously undertakes the mission of making lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ. Change techniques required in order to make adaptive changes to establish "adoption" as a baseline hermeneutic must be defined and robustly applied. The process for implementing the adaptive change necessary for enacting the new model will include an analysis of the ministry stakeholders and the recommended adaptive changes to be made by each. Change techniques that will be used to implement the needed transformations must also be identified and applied.

Constant evaluation of how well a church is implementing a hermeneutic of adoption will be required in order to keep the church moving forward in the adaptive change of transitioning to adoptive youth ministry. Reports on both successes of and continuing challenges to the established discipleship plan provide a balanced assessment of how the ministry is progressing. In order to keep ministry efforts from stalling, it is important to identify continuing improvement actions necessary to address continuing challenges. At the same time, youth ministry teams can continue to implement the demanding adaptive changes necessary to move a church to a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry.

There are further areas of research in the psychosocial and spiritual development of adolescents that could be considerably helpful to churches seeking to enact a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry. In-depth research and application of family ministry techniques could aid the church in discipling adolescents for the long term. Research on advanced adolescent brain studies could provide further insight into developing adolescent lifelong discipleship-building strategies. Because late adolescence is extending into the early to mid-twenties, research to determine how to more effectively disciple those transitioning from late adolescence into young adulthood could also benefit the Church.

Though there is no guarantee that actions to nurture youth toward lifelong discipleship through a hermeneutic of adoption for youth ministry will ensure that each and every adolescent becomes and remains a faithful lifelong disciple of Jesus Christ, God is known for his faithfulness. However, the church that embraces contemporary adolescents with an unconditional, adoptive love can better help them to "keep their

heads above water" in the sea of adolescent development and swim against the "countercurrent" of cultural abandonment in which they find themselves. During a recent youth gathering at St. Paul, the youth pastor prefaced a statement he was about to make by saying, "I'm about to say something you won't often hear me say." An adolescent attending for the first time quickly responded in a joking manner, "What, are you going to tell you that you love us?" Before the youth pastor could reply, another adolescent who had been a mainstay in the youth ministry for several years replied in a more serious tone, "No, that's not it. He tells us that all the time!"

Adolescents who have been nurtured toward lifelong discipleship through a hermeneutic of adoption recognize that they are loved merely for the persons who God created them to be. When adolescents in a church are embraced with the adoptive love God demonstrated to Abraham, and then to the nation Israel, they may not articulate the concept in these terms. They are, though, more likely to understand that they have the freedom to pursue discipleship of Jesus Christ, as through the Spirit they eagerly await by faith the righteousness for which they hope (Galatians 5:5). Adoptive adult disciplers reveal to adolescents in their care that the righteousness for which they actively await together is not based on any false performance-standard of righteousness, but that "the only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love" (Galatians 5:6). A church in which caring adults journey together with adolescents—actively awaiting Christ's righteousness in their lives together by sharing the journey of faith—can increase the possibility that their sons and daughters will become lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.

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